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SF

NEW WRITINGS 27

Edited by
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NEW WRITINGS IN SF 27

Edited by Kenneth Bulmer

Featuring

Brian Aldiss Graham Charnock
Vera Johnson Bob van Laerhoven
John Rackham Keith Wells



NEW WRITINGS IN SF 27

Edited by Kenneth Bulmer

Kenneth Bulmer has selected ten brand-new stories, by old and new writers, for this popular series. 'By one of those chances that delight', he writes, 'this volume seems to have grown itself around a theme. Human emotions – raw, subtle overpowering, controlled – manipulated as ideas within image, these are what these stories celebrate; but, because they are SF, we are faced also with emotions from machine-mobiles and from beings who are not of this Earth.' This collection contains the following stories:

BARTHOLOMEW & SON (AND THE FISH GIRL)

by Michael G. Goney

THE DAY THEY CUT OFF THE POWER

by Vera Johnson

A TIME OF MIND

by Keith Wells

YEAR BY YEAR THE EVIL GAINS

by Brian W. Aldiss

LONG TIME AGO, NOT FORGOTTEN

by Bob Van Laerhoven

ZONE

by Peter Linnett

HEATWAVE

by David Langford

HEAL THYSELF

by John Rackham

CASSIUS AND THE MIND-JAUNT

by Colin Kapp

THE OBSERVER

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NEW WRITINGS IN SF

27

In the same series

New Writings in SF 1-26

**New Writings
in SF
(27)**

edited by

KENNETH BULMER



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LONDON

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FOREWORD

by

KENNETH BULMER

THERE are no other conventions or conferences quite like science fiction conventions. The reasons for this happy state of affairs are lengthy, complex and besides being highly revealing are highly satisfactory. Do not, however, jump to the conclusion that people who regularly attend SF conventions are complacent about these gatherings. Far from it.

The first English convention was held in Leeds in 1937, followed in 1938 by the first of very many London conventions. The World SF Convention, most of which have been held in the U.S.A., is run on a rota system. The U.S. is divided into three zones, East and West Coast, and the Midwest. Other countries of the world have from time to time hosted the World convention, and Australia was the venue in 1975. London has seen two World conventions, in 1957 and 1965. Now, strong bidding will be taking place for the next British World Convention to be held here in 1979. The campaign slogan is BRITAIN IS FINE IN SEVENTY NINE.

It was at a convention—SFancon Five held in Gent to which the Belgian SF enthusiasts had kindly invited me—that I first met Bob Van Laerhoven, author of 'Long Time Ago, Not Forgotten'. As Guest of Honour I had the pleasant task of presenting Bob Van Laerhoven with his award for writing the winning story in a competition sponsored by the Belgian SF club whose leading lights, Simon Joukes, Andre de Rycke and their friends, made of the Gent convention a first class gathering. More than fifty people from Britain made the pilgrimage to Gent and it so happened the con coincided with a British week there. I think the con attendees added no little colour to the proceedings. 'Long Time Ago, Not Forgotten' was written after the convention,

and combined with the translation by Les Cornwell are the effects of some delightful turns of phrase that are foreign to the English ear. They help to reinforce the deliberate alienness of the story, making it memorable as an example of language being used to express the very strangeness of the speaker within the story.

Michael G. Coney's story which leads off this volume contains a large number of interesting notions skilfully blended to form an intriguing package around the central theme. The author now lives in Canada and has recently been writing novels that have received some considerable attention.

All readers of *NEW WRITINGS* will be pleased to welcome another new lady writer to these pages, and one may add, in parenthesis, that meeting Vera Johnson is quite an experience, as many con attendees will attest as they recall four a.m. guitar sessions in various hotel corridors. Vera says of herself:

Quote: 'I knew as soon as I learned to read that I was going to be a writer, but there were distractions along the way—the depression, secretarial jobs, the war, a husband and three daughters. Sold my first story in 1949. Sold others, radio plays, won a couple of contests, then a three months' scholarship at the Instituto Allende, Mexico. One story listed on Roll of Honour of 'Best American Short Stories of 1953'. In 1966 decided to make a full-time career of folksinging. So busy writing songs, didn't get back to fiction until 1972, and then tackled SF—a new field, though I'd been reading it since 1937. Now spend about two months a year in Vancouver, six months touring British folk clubs, four months touring Canada and the U.S.A. Have made two LPs, one in the U.S.A. and one in England.' Unquote

With 'A Time of Mind' Keith Wells continues his zestful attack on the humdrum begun with his highly successful 'The Cat and the Coin' in *NEW WRITINGS* in SF 25. The sense of the paranormal operating logically beyond the confines of our every day reality is faithfully recorded, and the recorded highlights translated into terms that carry us be-

yond the bounds of this mortal earth. If strangeness—otherness—can show us an emotional flowering, as in Mr. Van Laerhoven's story, through a compacted and unusual use of language, might not language itself, as has been suggested, control the dynamic flow of events?

In 'Year by Year the Evil Gains' written with the usual impeccable style associated with Brian W. Aldiss, we are transported to the surface of Jupiter, and not, I hasten to point out, in a balloon. When Pioneer II transitted the orbit of Jupiter's smallest moon, Amalthea, some of the instruments went wild; but at the point of closest approach no less than 10,000,000 high energy electrons bombarded every square inch—enough to kill stone dead every person on earth above ground in one second, according to reports. Interestingly enough, Pioneer II is programmed to reach Saturn on 5th September, 1979, just about the time of the next British World Convention.

Peter Linnett makes a point of insisting to me (in what I consider to be something of a defensive spirit) that not all his closest friends are undertakers. The undercover knowledge displayed in 'And When I Die' in 24 made a more direct disclaimer imperative, and here, in the form of a sombre and chilling piece, 'Zone', Peter Linnett provides us with the required proof. 'Zone' and Vera Johnson's story in this volume, taken together, must give us all food for thought in deciding what we want to do for the best in the future for youth. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that these two stories would find ready markets among some governments to be put into policy documents—today.

Now for a complete change of mood. David Langford who is something of a parodist in the best—or worst—Oxford tradition, has his thumb placed squarely on the computer's start button. But also, slyly, he has his little finger as firmly fixed on the query button. It's a frightening thought; but from that aspect, 'Heatwave' is all too believable!

Graham Charnock's 'The Observer' has much the same effect as an electron microscope and the sensitive enquiry beneath the surfaces of life augurs well for the future work

of Graham Charnock, whose first story for NEW WRITINGS this is.

Both John Rackham and Colin Kapp have appeared a number of times previously in NEW WRITINGS and here they present us with new stories that indicate their developing interests. The Rackham is another of his rural scenes that makes no concessions to modern artificiality, while Kapp takes his hardware into the pulpy softness of the human brain.

Here are ten brand new stories, by old and new writers. By one of those chances that delight, this volume seems to have grown itself around a theme. Human emotions—raw, subtle, overpowering, controlled—manipulated as idea within image, these are what these stories celebrate; but, because they are SF we are faced also with emotions from machine-mobiles and from beings who are not of this Earth.

KENNETH BULMER

BARTHOLOMEW & SON (AND THE FISH-GIRL)

by

MICHAEL G. CONEY

Slithes were emotion receptors and reflectors, and working with them had turned Joe Sagar into a keen observer of the teeming life of the Peninsula. He could see and shake his head over the mytho-poetic qualities of the strands entangling the lives of his acquaintances. And what he eventually discovered about a judge of human nature—and fish nature, too—a clever designer, a man who could weave dreams from metal and glass and paint, a calculating artist with light and shade who knew how to juggle the emotions, gave him a clearer understanding of many more things and people than merely the two Bartholomews, father and son, and Carioca Jones, and emotion mobiles ... not forgetting the fish girl ...

BARTHOLOMEW & SON (AND THE FISH-GIRL)

Most evenings I sit alone in the living room of my two-storey house on the east coast of the Peninsula. Recently the slithe farm has occupied most of the daylight hours, so by the time I have locked the little animals in their hutches, showered and changed and eaten, and stretched out on the chesterfield opposite the window to think about things, the sun is a pink memory in the sky above the flat black land, and the islands in the Strait have become eerie like floating things. Occasionally, far out, the wake of a fast boat will glitter silver and once or twice I have seen sling-gliders rise high into the thin sunlight and glow like cinders against the pale cold sky.

In the corner of the room, beside the inoperative 3-V alcove, stands an emotion mobile. I never switch it on, not even for company.

ONE

SINCE the tsunami following the Western Seaboard Slide the Peninsula has been sparsely populated. There are but two centres of population; Louise in the south, now almost a city, and Roberts Bay in the north, where I live. Roberts Bay is scarcely more than a village but has a good tourist trade during the summer, when the curious come to sample the unique atmosphere of the northern extremity of the Peninsula, with its flat landscape, indented coastline, wild life and yacht marinas.

One January morning I was driving along a track marked by broken, flattened brush and grass where the ground-

effect vehicles had passed. Every now and then I would catch sight of a movement among the bushes; usually by the time I looked, everything was still—but once I saw a garden barracuda, all teeth and cold eyes, lying beside a tall clump of grass, gills pulsing. Nearby a small octopus hung draped over the low branch of a cedar. It is at a time like this that a man begins to think of mechanical breakdowns.

Further on a new sign stood beside the track; it read: BARTHOLOMEW. I turned left, drove up to the old low house at the water's edge and stopped. I climbed from the hovercar, gathered the quiescent slithe up from the back seat, and made my way past a rough timber shack to the front door of the house. Knocking on the peeling paintwork I glanced involuntarily behind, feeling pursued, half-expecting to see the barracuda threading glistening through the tussocks of the overgrown garden towards me. A youth emerged from the shack, wiping his hands on paint-streaked clothing.

'What do you want?' he asked in belligerent tones; then he saw the slithe in my arms. 'Oh, you'll be Joe Sagar. Dad said you'd be coming. What the hell he wants with a slithe, I can't think.'

'Neither can I,' I agreed politely.

'Yeah, well maybe I can,' the younger Bartholomew contradicted himself. 'He's lost confidence, the old man has. He needs the animal to bear out his judgement, such as it is.' So saying, he disappeared into the shack, leaving me alone with the possibility of barracudas.

Fortunately the door opened at this moment; a pleasant-faced middle-aged man stood there, smiling faintly. 'Come in, Mr. Sagar,' he said. 'I'm Hector Bartholomew.'

Later we sat in Bartholomew's studio; a large room of incredible untidiness, overlooking the sea. Around us stood the mobiles. Bartholomew had been telling me about himself, and why he had come to the Peninsula six months ago.

'Peace of mind, Mr. Sagar,' he was saying. 'That's the secret of sculpting. Back on the mainland I got so that I couldn't create at all—you know what the pressure's like over there . . . Here, it's peaceful. Nobody bothers you—no traffic, no crowds. People come here for fun, and you can

sense it. You need to be relaxed if you want to create good mobiles . . .'

The slithe stirred in my arms. It was mid-afternoon and I couldn't stay here all day, but there was something restful about Bartholomew and it was good to feel relaxed in the presence of a fellow man. You get so many weirdos on the Peninsula. 'Uh, I'd like to see your mobiles,' I ventured.

He came out of his trance. 'Of course, of course. I was forgetting . . . That's what you're here for, isn't it? Right . . .'

He drew the drapes and flicked a switch and the nearest mobile came to slow life, glowing, surrounding itself in a beautiful helix of emerald light while a soft murmur of deep sound filled the room, pulsing like the waves of the ocean. The helix revolved upon itself quietly and endlessly, shifting through turquoise to cobalt to silver, while I thought of the warm tropic sea and the pink sands, the intricate coral and brilliant fishes, the girl, and love . . .

Bartholomew switched it off and suddenly I was looking at a strange conglomeration of twisted metal, tiny sprockets and chains and light bulbs, all on a black plinth and standing about two feet high. It was all gone, the mood, the memories; the only thing left was the wonder that one middle-aged man could create such beauty. He was about five foot nine and grey, he wore a brown jacket with paint streaks and as he turned away and opened the drapes his pants had that baggy look at the seat which old men's pants get.

Yet even the animal in my lap had appreciated his genius. As the drapes rustled back and the room flooded with light, Bartholomew's eyes went straight to the slithe and he smiled. I looked down. The emotion-sensitive skin of the little reptile was glowing pink with pleasure; as we watched, the colour faded slowly.

Bartholomew reached out and stroked the soft skin. 'Incredible,' he murmured. 'Now you know why I asked you to bring a slithe.'

I smiled back at him. 'Can't you trust what people tell you?'

His eyes clouded; he sat down, looking suddenly tired. 'Not when my own mind keeps telling me my work is

deteriorating. I tell you, Mr. Sagar, it's a tightrope. Each mobile I create, I think to myself: it's not so good as the last. I'm losing my touch. You understand, it's a delicate thing I'm moulding. The emotions . . . One wrong touch and people will laugh. Or scream . . .' His voice was hesitant; he was expressing himself poorly but I thought I knew what he meant. 'No, I need a guinea pig to reassure me, a creature unlike Man with his false words. I need an unthinking animal guided by instinct alone. A slithe. I can't believe what people tell me. I can't even believe my own son . . .'

He let the words hang there. 'Your son is an artist too, I understand,' I said brightly.

'We're arranging a joint exhibition in April,' he replied.

Later that week Carioca Jones called. I was in the workshop where a group of female State Prisoners were stitching slitheskins with dull resentment, the dark blue tone of the skins they handled bearing testimony to their mood. I feel it is my duty to support the penal system by hiring these people and so helping the Penitentiary to become self-supporting, but sometimes I wonder if it is worth it. Dave Froehlich, himself an S.P. man but bonded to me by contract, entered.

'Miss Jones is in the yard,' he announced coldly. He resented me too.

I hurried outside to find the ex 3-V star posing against the gate, dressed like a model, appearing not to notice my approach as she gazed out to sea, her white-gloved hand shading her eyes, her chin raised to smooth the wrinkles. Flopped on the ground at her feet lay her land shark, gills pulsing as it watched a terrified cluster of slithes huddled against the far end of the nearest pen.

'Hello, Carioca,' I said. 'Look, I hope you don't mind my mentioning it, but your fish is alarming the slithes.' By now the small reptiles were trampling on one another, almost yellow with fear.

'Joe darling! How nice to see you, it's been *ages*.' She smiled carefully as she turned towards me, her dark eyes opaque.

'Carioca, the fish, please.'

'Oh, Wilberforce is *quite* harmless, you know that, Joe. Why those silly little animals should make such a fuss I can't think. Anyway, it was Wilberforce I came to see you about. I'm entering him in the pet show next month, and I want to order a little something for him. You know, like a ruff, to put round his neck. He has a fine head, and a ruff would set it off *beautifully*.'

I led the way to the workshop. The fish dragged behind with its unpleasant undulating gait.

The S.P. girls had downed tools in my absence and stood talking in a sullen group. There was no sign of Dave. I addressed one of the girls. 'Jean, measure up the fish for a ruff, will you?'

She looked me straight in the eye with that aggressive expression favoured by State Prisoners as though you, not they, are the criminals. 'I'll do no such thing,' she said. 'I know my rights. And will you look at those teeth.'

Carioca flushed and was about to speak, when another girl burst out: 'Oh, aren't you Carioca Jones? President of the Foes of Bondage?'

There was a murmur of recognition from the others and the sullenness was instantly gone. Their champion had arrived: Carioca Jones, the woman who had fought their cause—though for dubious motives—from every platform on the Peninsula. They clustered around her; like peasants, I thought disgustedly, clutching at her skirts. She smiled like a queen. 'Are you all happy here?' she asked graciously. 'Is he treating you well?'

'For God's sake, Carioca,' I muttered.

The damage was done. 'Here's a measure,' said one of the State Prisoners, handing it to me.

Carioca was watching me now, and she is a good customer. Nervously I twisted the measure around my fingers and, holding it like a garotte, tried to approach the land shark from behind. The brute was too quick for me, whipping around abruptly and slashing at my hands with down-hung jaw. I jerked back, fear turning to temper.

'The hell with this,' I snapped. 'You measure the bastard, Carioca!'

She seemed to gain height and her adorers fell away from her like dead leaves. 'What did you say, Joe?'

'Sorry, sorry. The fish scared me, that's all. Would you mind measuring him yourself, Carioca?'

'Oh ... Here, let me have that.' She knelt before the huge shark; its eyes were level with hers, they watched her icily. Smiling, talking reassuringly to the brute, she slipped the measure over its flat head and read off the inches. She straightened up and addressed us all. 'That's what *love* will do. I have no need of slaves around me to bolster my ego with their servility. An easy conscience and the love of a good animal is all I ask, I have need of no more ...' It was her platform speech and I daresay the S.P. girls had heard it before, too; but they showed no signs of boredom as they watched her, entranced. I would get no more work from them today; Carioca Jones was telling them that work was degrading, and Carioca Jones was their leader. At last she finished and smiled at me triumphantly, having revenged herself for my ill-tempered outburst.

'Can I drive you home, Carioca?' I asked, resignedly. It was a traditional offer; a small part of the price I paid for her custom.

'To the kennels if you don't mind, Joe,' she said. 'Wilberforce must be fitted for a new oxygenator. He's gasping a lot lately, hadn't you noticed?'

I had, but it was not the sort of thing I would comment on. Then, as we made for the car, she hesitated, glancing at me. 'Joe ... Slip back and get a piece of slitheskin, will you?'

Dave was nearby with some new pelts, freshly shed. I called him over and he handed one to Carioca; she tied it in a loose loop and slipped it over the land shark's neck. Kneeling, she put her arm around the fish's sinuous body and gazed into the cold eye. 'Show Uncle Joe how much you love me, Wilberforce,' she cooed.

The sad flat trap of the mouth parted slightly, the eye swivelled back and met the woman's. The emotion-sensitive slitheskin remained obstinately dun-coloured, draped around the rough grey neck like a rag. Even where it

touched the fish's skin, there was not the slightest trace of the pink of pleasure.

'It's a freshly-shed skin, Carioca,' I mumbled, embarrassed. 'It hasn't matured properly yet.'

She stood, whipped the skin from the shark's neck, threw it at Dave and climbed silently into my hovercar, Wilberforce leaping ponderously after her. A few minutes later we arrived at the kennels; despite the shortness of the journey, the car stank abominably of fish by the time we pulled up and got out. I opened the back door and Carioca dragged Wilberforce forth, none too gently.

Pacific Kennels is a small operation run by a vet named Miranda Marshbanks, a statuesque woman with pretensions towards the cultural image. Her house was visible among the trees, a mock-tudor monster with leaded windows and shrub-acned lawns. We stood beside the business end of the venture which consisted of a rectangular arena, some forty feet by twenty, enclosed by tall chain-link fencing. Down the long sides were rows of hutches each of which had a strong steel-barred door at either end, one opening into the arena, the other outwards. Fearsome faces stared at us as we walked towards the house. The arena was full of strange beasts; the chill air had rendered them comatose. I saw dogfish and squid, giant anemones and turtles, wolf eels and, out of place in this sinister company, a smiling mammalian dolphin. Among all these a girl in S.P. coveralls walked, casually stepping through a milling group of gregarious sharks.

Carioca Jones nearly fell as Wilberforce lunged for the fence with jaws agape, eager to kill something.

'Well, Carioca, how nice to see you. And Wilberforce ... This is a pleasant surprise.' Miss Marshbanks bore down on us, a horse mackerel frisking at her heels.

'Miranda ...' The women embraced effusively then stepped back a pace, fencing for an opening.

'Oh, dear, I can see what the trouble is.' Miss Marshbanks knelt beside the land shark and prodded the brute as he lay gasping on the grass, exhausted by the short walk. 'We're growing too fat, aren't we, dear?' Wilberforce made a

token slash at her hand. 'And a fat fish is a bad-tempered fish, isn't it?'

'Actually, Miranda *darling*, I brought Wilberforce to have his oxygenator replaced.' Carioca glanced towards the arena. 'Is that a *bonded girl* you have there?'

'Yes. Rosalie. She's quite good.'

'Well, my dear, I'm sure she needs to be, with all those strange creatures in there. How *clever* of you to get a bonded girl for the job.' Carioca knew better than any of us that a bonded State Prisoner must take anything his employer cares to throw at him—in return for a one-third remission of sentence. 'She can do Wilberforce, if you're so *worried* about his temper.'

'My dear Carioca, pets don't worry me. I have a way with them. However . . .' She took a step towards the arena then hesitated with a slight frown. The girl Rosalie was leaning against the far side of the fence, talking animatedly with a young man who I thought I recognised. 'No, she's busy. I won't interrupt them; Jonathan Bartholomew's such a nice lad. Just like his father, Hector Bartholomew. You know, *the* Hector Bartholomew. The sculptor.' She drove her point home mercilessly. 'I have one of his works in the house; he gave it me. As a gift. Although . . .' she sighed, 'I really feel Jonathan has more talent. I have one of his works too; I fancy it has more *impact*. How fortunate we are to have two such talented artists—world-renowned, I might say—living here on the Peninsula. You know them, of course, Carioca dear?'

Carioca did not reply; she was watching Jonathan Bartholomew as the boy chatted, smiling, with the bonded S.P. girl. There was a predatory gleam in her black eyes.

'I'll introduce you sometime,' continued Miranda, correctly interpreting the silence. 'But not now. I really must be getting on with my work. Just leave Wilberforce with me, my dear, and I'll have him ready for you tomorrow. Bye, then,' she concluded brightly.

The light of battle glowed in Carioca Jones' eyes as we walked back to the hovercar.

Two

I MENTIONED the girl Rosalie to Hector Bartholomew the next time I visited him. We were sitting on the patio overlooking the Strait in an unseasonable burst of February sunshine; far out across the water a speeding launch whipped around the Fulcrum post, flinging a sling-glider into the pale sky.

'I'd heard about that.' Bartholomew was squinting, watching the tiny glider banking inland. 'Not from Jonathan, though. He never mentions the girl. It's his own business, I reckon.' He frowned slightly.

At that moment Jonathan appeared around the side of the house, saw us and sat down on a nearby chair. 'How's it going?' he asked. He smiled at the slithe in my lap. After the initial belligerence he had displayed at our first meeting, his attitude towards me had mellowed; in fact he was turning out to be quite a pleasant lad. 'Did you fix the old man's mobiles?' He and his father then discussed their individual philosophies regarding the purpose of emotion mobiles; although they appeared to disagree on almost every point, I sensed a deep bond of friendship between them.

After a while the door-bell rang. Hector Bartholomew left and after a few moments I heard a familiar voice trilling at the front of the house. Shortly afterwards Carioca Jones stepped onto the patio, black eyes darting about appraisingly and finally settling on Jonathan like meat flies. Hector introduced her to his son, somewhat reluctantly, I thought.

'I was so *fascinated* by one of your mobiles I saw at Miranda Marshbank's place, Mr. Bartholomew . . .' Although she addressed the father, her eyes dwelt speculatively on Jonathan. 'Of course, I've seen them on the 3-V from time to time, who hasn't? I mean, the name Bartholomew is a household word. But you don't get the same effect unless you see them in the *flesh* . . .'

'Yes, well . . . Uh, what can we do for you, Miss Jones?' There was distaste in Bartholomew's expression as he regarded the middle-aged woman with the overdone eyes.

'Oh, this is just a social call, Mr. Bartholomew . . . May I

call you Hector? It is Hector, isn't it? And Jonathan ... You must call me Carioca. No, I insist. Well ...' She settled back in a chair, smiling. 'Isn't this *too* pleasant, and such a view? We really ought to have got acquainted before this; I've been *terribly* remiss with my visiting recently; interesting new people move in and I don't even know they're here ... But then, I've been so busy with the Foes of Bondage and my other social work ...'

'Foes of Bondage?' Jonathan spoke for the first time.

'I'm the President this year; it's an onerous position but so rewarding. Someone must take a stand against those *fiends* who call themselves the Government, otherwise where would we be?'

'The Foes of Bondage is a women's action group,' I explained to Hector who was looking puzzled.

'The ranks of the Foes are open to all, regardless of race, colour or creed, or sex,' Carioca said, rather sharply. 'We are dedicated to the reform of the Penal Code which, under our present laws, is simply legalized *slavery*. Merely because a person has made a mistake, committed a so-called crime, does not mean that he should be stripped of all dignity. In the old days—and we of the Foes consider them the more civilised days—a convicted person was left alone to meditate the error of his ways in the privacy of his cell. There was no coercion; he joined in the activities of his fellow prisoners if he wished; he could read, study; there were cinemas and organised hobbies. Everyone was happy. But now—what happens? A prisoner is put to work—hired out like a *pack animal* to those whose work is too rough for them. Even that wouldn't be so bad, if it were not for Bondage. The principle of Bondage is an *abomination*, Hector dear.'

'I understood a prisoner undertook to be bonded of his own free will,' said Bartholomew mildly.

'Quite; but little does he realise what's in store for him. In return for a *paltry* one-third remission of sentence he is forced to do anything his employer wants. *Anything*.' Carioca laughed shortly, and once again I was amazed at the brevity of her memory ... 'And we all know what *some* people are like.'

Hector had been watching Carioca with very little expression on his mild face; he spoke quietly. 'I believe a man gets what he deserves, Miss Jones. If you're suggesting we go back to the old days when a crook was paid by the taxpayer to sit on his ass all day you're even more stupid than you look. The State Pens are self-supporting, now. Let's keep it that way.'

'Well, really,' Carioca murmured, for once looking flustered. 'You artists, you're so *blunt*.' She glanced around for support. 'But you agree with me, don't you, Jonathan dear?' Instinctively, she had found the one wedge she could drive between father and son.

Jonathan looked at Hector. 'I think the Bondage system is pretty despicable,' he said. 'You talk about the bad old days; well, Bondage goes back even further. It's feudal.'

Hector Bartholomew's eyes met mine and I saw an appeal for help there; but there was nothing I could say. The damage had been done, and after a while Jonathan took Carioca to see his mobiles. They emerged from the shack just as I was leaving.

'Why, they're *wonderful*, Jonathan,' Carioca was saying. 'Such power, such *virility*. And the music! I've never heard music like it. You must come over to my place soon. Tomorrow. I play the orchestrella and I'm quite good, *really*. I'd love to play some of your things.'

'I'd noticed you had beautiful hands, Carioca,' said Jonathan, fatuously.

She held them up, slender and pale in the February sunlight, and I shuddered as I hurried for my car.

I had seen the graft scars, white and thin around the wrists...

One evening a few weeks later I was taking a stroll along the sea wall. There had been a lot of activity in the Strait; sling-gliders practicing for the start of the season. They were making a wide turn around Roberts Bay and dropping to the water near the sea wall where their assistants were waiting to drag the pilots from the water and lay the tiny wood and fabric gliders on the grass to dry. I paused for a while to speak to Doug Marshall, then I resumed my walk

inland along the lane, approaching the sea again at a tiny wharf about a mile from Bartholomew's place. I walked on to the ancient timbers and scanned the Strait; it was becoming dark and most of the gliding was finished.

A sound caused me to jerk around, my heart thumping suddenly. In the twilight the possibility of a shoal of land sharks is never far from my mind. There have been some unpleasant incidents on the Peninsula recently; escaped pets forming killer packs, preying on livestock and occasionally Man.

'It's ... It's Mr. Sagar, isn't it?' A girl stepped from beside the small corrugated iron hut at the end of the wharf; I'd been so busy watching the gliders I hadn't noticed her.

'Oh.' She must have heard the relief in my voice and I felt an idiot. 'Hello, Rosalie.' It was Miranda Marshbanks' fish-girl.

'I've been watching the gliders,' she said. 'They're beautiful. It must be marvellous to fly like that. So free ... Have you ever been up in one, Mr. Sagar?'

I shivered. 'Not me. I'd rather keep my feet on the ground, thanks. Why don't you ask Jonathan to take you up? He knows some of the club members. They have a two-man trainer there.'

She was silent, turning away and staring across the Strait. The wind ruffled her long hair and I watched her for a moment, wondering what her crime was. I heard her sniff and realised to my dismay that she was crying.

'Look, uh, can I help? It's often better to talk about it. So they say.'

She turned towards me at that, leaning against me while she dampened my collar with her tears, and told me the old story.

Jonathan wasn't seeing her any more. He'd given her up and she thought it was because she wasn't worthy of him, being a cuh-criminal. She'd never loved anyone like she loved Jonathan, and now he was gone and she couldn't bear it, and Miss Marshbanks was a pig. She was so unhappy and she had been looking forward to her release in a few weeks' time when she and Jonathan had been going to get married, but now it was all over and she had nothing left to live for.

'So I'm going to tell Miss Marshbanks just what I think of her, and she'll revoke my cuh-contract and I'll lose my remission and I'll have to go back to that awful prison for months, maybe years,' she concluded in a welter of delicious pessimism.

'No, you're not,' I said, firmly. 'You're going to keep quiet and be good and you'll be free in a couple of weeks, and by then Jonathan will have changed his mind again and everything will be all right. You'll see.'

'How do you know? He doesn't love me any more ...'

'That affair broke up weeks ago,' Hector Bartholomew told me as we sat drinking in the studio overlooking the dark sea. Mobiles stood around in varying stages of completion, yet there was an unused look about them, a dusty appearance as though work had been suspended. 'I was pretty damned sorry about it, too. Jonathan and I had a hell of a row.'

I was surprised. 'I thought you weren't happy about him going about with an S.P. girl.'

'There are worse things than S.P. girls.' Then for a while Bartholomew was silent. He stood, slowly, looking older, and refilled the glasses. 'Jonathan's moved out,' he said at last. 'That woman Jones has set him up in a studio at her place. Christ knows what goes on there. She's old enough to be his grandmother. I saw him the other day. He says he's working. I don't know.'

I let his hesitant words hang in the air for a while, then said: 'You and he were pretty close, weren't you?' Then I cursed myself silently for speaking in the past tense.

'Years ago I got custody of him when my wife and I separated ... Which shows how close we were, even then. We've always had the same interests. He'll be a better artist than me, one day. But we always did things together, you understand, Joe? And now ... You remember the joint exhibition we were organising?'

'Yes.'

'It's on Friday. It's still being held. But it won't be an exhibition any more—Carioca Jones will see to that. It'll be a competition ...'

I CALLED on Carioca Jones on the Thursday to find her full of excitement over the forthcoming exhibition. 'Jonathan's done some simply *wonderful* mobiles, Joe,' she told me. 'I'd invite you for a preview in the studio, but he's there now putting the finishing touches and he hates being disturbed. *Such* a sensitive boy.'

I gave her the slitheskin ruff for the land shark and apologised for the delay.

'That's quite all right, Joe darling. And in any case, Wilberforce is at Miranda Marshbanks' kennels for a few days.'

'Oh? Nothing serious, I hope?'

For once Carioca looked discomfited. 'Er ... It's *awkward*, you see—he disturbs Jonathan. Somehow Jonathan doesn't seem to like him and Wilberforce *senses* it; he's so perceptive that way. It's a long story.' She sighed. 'But to cut it short, Wilberforce snapped at Jonathan, just a little snap. And it's so important that Jonathan is able to create with a serene mind right now with the exhibition on top of us, so I thought it best for Wilberforce to be out of the way for a while. And he simply *loves* Miranda.'

'I'm sorry about that. Do you think Jonathan will be around? I wanted to see him for a moment.'

'Well...' she said, doubtfully. 'I'm not sure. Is it that important?'

'It's about his father.'

Instantly her attitude hardened. 'In that case, Joe darling, I most *certainly* won't have him disturbed. Really, that *awful* man. Just thinking about him makes my blood boil!'

'For God's sake, Carioca, what's he ever done to you?'

'My dear, he's so uncouth, so rude. I can only assume that Jonathan got his nice manners from his mother. His father's rudeness drove Jonathan from his home, and when I offered the poor boy sanctuary, that *dreadful* man came pounding on my door one night, *blind* drunk, and called me the most abominable names!'

My opinion of the mild-mannered Hector Bartholomew

rose further at this. There was no point in pursuing the conversation, so I expressed sympathy and left.

I drove into Louise for lunch, and later walked along the main street to the Princess Louise, the ancient beached liner around which the small city is built. There was activity at the entrance and signs were being put up advertising tomorrow's Joint Exhibition of Emotion Mobiles. The name of Bartholomew seemed to be everywhere and suddenly I saw Jonathan himself going inside. I followed, and eventually ran him to ground in the coffee shop on the boat deck. I greeted him and sat beside him at the counter. The place was empty.

'Oh, hello, Mr. Sagar,' he said, guardedly. We were perched on stools and his pants leg had ridden up, revealing white bandaging around his ankle.

'I saw your father yesterday,' I said, coming straight to the point. 'Jonathan, he's lost his touch. I don't know how the exhibition's going to shape up.'

'Look, are you saying this is my fault?'

'Well, yes. You and he were close. He's feeling damned lonely—and his mobiles depended on happiness. How can he create joy out of misery?'

I had gone too far. Jonathan was frowning. 'Oh, for God's sake, Mr. Sagar. You're overstating the case. You're as sentimental as he is. If he expects me to run out on Carioca right now, he's a poor judge of character. She's been a good friend to me, and she's financing my share of the exhibition.'

He gulped down his coffee and was gone.

My thoughts turned to Hector last night, sitting among those mobiles, adjusting an arm here, a reflector there, while the slithe in my arms remained obstinately brown. After a drink or two I had left him there and let myself out; the light was on in the shack which had been Jonathan's studio. I opened the door to switch it off and saw a small mobile on the bench. It couldn't have been more than a foot high; it was an intricate thing and, in its present immobility, quite interesting. I wondered what it was doing here; I recognised Hector's style clearly, but why hadn't he shown it to me?

I became inquisitive, and switched the thing on.

The music was almost inaudible but it sent a thrill of unease down my spine. I had switched the lights off; the mobile glowed abruptly, sharp bursts of muted colour, reds and browns and greys and cold, cold blue. Tiny arms gestured with spiderish menace and the whole thing seemed to sidle towards me as though seeking a companion in ugliness and misery. I found I was leaning towards it and there was a sob in my throat. The slithe twisted desperately in my arms, squealing, and broke the spell as it leaped to the floor and disappeared into the night.

I switched the mobile off, closed the door and left, shivering.

For a few seconds I had looked into Hector Bartholomew's soul.

I have never been involved with an art exhibition before and I was under a misapprehension when I arrived and found a large crowd of people already milling around in the foyer of the Princess Louise. A powerful man took my ticket.

'Isn't it *marvellous*, darling!' Carioca greeted me. She was dressed entirely in white with the exception of long slitheskin gloves which were glowing pink with pleasure. She'd had an extensive face job and could have passed for thirty-seven.

At that moment a harassed-looking Jonathan emerged from behind the scenes and put us straight. 'The size of the crowd means nothing,' he said. 'The drinks are free.' A waiter passed near and I took a glass of something brown. 'It's not like the premiere of a movie,' Jonathan continued. 'The success of the exhibition is judged by the cash takings, tonight. If people don't buy now, while they're hot, they never will.' He glanced around, looking even more worried. 'They look a mean bunch of bastards.'

'Nonsense, darling,' trilled Carioca, smiling graciously at someone.

I saw Doug Marshall with other members of the sling-gliding club and drifted across. 'I didn't know you were interested in this kind of thing,' I said.

'The club was sent a dozen tickets,' he explained. 'After all the trouble we've had with Carioca Jones and her Foes of bloody Bondage, the least we can do is to drink her liquor.' He seized a passing glass and downed it rapidly.

In the corner a group was producing strange music composed, I imagined by Jonathan. There was no sign of Hector Bartholomew.

'What makes you think it's Carioca's liquor?' I asked. 'I understood this was a joint Bartholomew venture. Expenses are deducted from sales.'

'Christ, Joe, can you imagine this affair showing a profit? They'll be lucky if they sell a couple of items. This is Louise, not one of your big mainland cities. Everyone's here for the drinks.'

Somebody jostled me; more people were crowding into the foyer. Nearby, the balding Secretary of the sling-gliding club was laughing raucously, head thrown back and false teeth gleaming in the flickering lights. My eyes were smarting; a lot of people were smoking and the ventilation was poor. I began to wish I hadn't come. I consumed another drink quickly, trying to get in the mood.

Miranda Marshbanks was clutching my arm. 'Can't think why I came, the whole thing is so *tasteless*. But what can you expect from a person like Carioca Jones? It's only for the Bartholomews' sake that I'm here.'

'I'm sure they'll be pleased,' I murmured, edging away.

Later I found a vantage point against the oak-panelled wall and leaned there, next to a waiter with a full tray. He met my eye and smiled slightly, uniting us against the mob.

Then suddenly Hector Bartholomew was standing by the double doors; he and Jonathan conversed briefly with no trace of expression on their faces while Carioca Jones looked brightly around and the roar of the crowd became muted. The doors were flung open. The exhibition was on.

The entire Princess Louise had been rented for the night; not because the exhibition needed the space, but in order to keep the undesirables out. As we surged along the steel corridors with the quaint cream-painted pipes overhead, I remembered noticing strong men at the entrance; the bars

were closed and deserted, the restaurant tables laid for non-existent customers. We entered the First-class Lounge and a kaleidoscope of flickering colour.

As I had expected, the exhibition was divided into two halves; the port being Jonathan's contribution and the star-board Hector's. The mobiles were arrayed against the two opposite walls like trophies, backed by plain black velvet. Each mobile was separated from its neighbour, being enclosed in a large rectangular box which widened towards the viewer like a square trumpet or a huge visiphone booth—so that you saw the mobile of your choice at the end of a tapering tunnel and received the full effect of flashing lights and eerie sound without being distracted by the mobile next door.

I watched the nearest of Jonathan's. Despite Miranda Marshbanks and three drunken glider pilots at my elbow, I was impressed by its power. Jonathan appeared to have found a new dimension in which to work; notwithstanding Hector's comments as to the strangeness of Jonathan's art, I was beginning to see what the boy was getting at. He had cast aside the traditional notion that a mobile should be pleasant—without going to the opposite extreme and inciting sorrow or fear. As I watched the glowing thing at the end of the tunnel, as I watched orbs revolve like suns, helices expand into starbursts and reform miraculously in the midst of blackness while dissonant chords surprised my ears, I felt uplifted.

There was something spiritual about Jonathan's work. It was inspired and inspiring, and despite the drinks I felt a better man for watching it. Beside me the drunks had fallen silent, Miranda Marshbanks' whinnying had ceased. 'Hey...' whispered Doug Marshall. 'D'you know what I wanna do, Joe? I wanna go and do something *good*, for a change. D'you feel it? Or is it just me?'

I walked over to where Jonathan stood silently. On the way I passed other mobiles; they were all different, but they were all good and they all possessed that indefinable something. 'Congratulations,' I said. 'I underestimated you, Jonathan. Who designed the background décor, by the way?'

'Carioca.' There was a look of boyish guilt on his face as he glanced towards her. 'I had to let her do something,' he said, confidentially. Our recent difference of opinion was forgotten.

I wondered about the relationship between him and the 3-V star. Of one thing I was sure—Carioca had never inspired him to these heights. The mobiles had come from within himself. If he had led Carioca Jones to believe he was fond of her, then he was taking her for a ride. I watched her as she strutted proudly up and down the line of exhibits, smiling at people, accepting their congratulations... I tried not to think badly of Jonathan; after all, Carioca was having her fun, even if it was costing her a small fortune. In due course Jonathan would leave her; but I could feel no sympathy. She asked for all she got. And as for Jonathan—he would receive the acclaim he deserved, all the advertisement he needed, for the small price of living in Carioca's house.

And breaking his father's heart...

The pattern of the exhibition had become plain now, and over a hundred people crowded around Jonathan's mobiles while, at the other end of the hall, Hector stood almost alone. I approached him; he had a haunted look.

'I was wrong,' he muttered. 'I was wrong. They're good. Just look at all those people. He'll sell every one.' His eyes met mine, then shifted away again. 'I'm glad about that, for his sake. But I don't understand it.' He stared at Carioca with unconcealed hatred. 'I'll never understand it, never.'

I know, now, that I ought to have told him; but I didn't have the courage. In telling Hector that Jonathan had no feeling for Carioca, I would at the same time be telling him that his son was a gold-digger, a gigolo. I couldn't do that. I thought I knew Hector—and I thought he'd rather his son were stupid and honest, than clever and crooked. Instead I said, 'There's a lot of intellect in Jonathan's mobiles, a lot of dynamism. They're idealistic, a young man's creation. But the emotions they arouse are a little lacking in simple pleasure.'

He smiled ruefully. 'Thanks, Joe. But they're all you say, and more. And it's not just because I'm his father that I'm

saying that. I wish I'd seen it before; but you know how stubborn an old fool can be, always thinking the old way is the right way. I think I might have stifled him in the past. Tonight, I'm proud of him. My only regret is that Carioca Jones has been instrumental in the whole thing.' He sighed, and waved his hand towards the handful of spectators at his end of the hall. 'And look at my damned things. There's not much simple pleasure in those, is there? There's not much of anything, if you'll be honest.' And he was right.

And so the weary evening wore on. When at last the crowd was gone, the four of us stood in the empty room among the cigarette butts and broken glass: Jonathan and Carioca at one end, Hector and I at the other, putting the mobiles in boxes. Glancing across at the enemy camp, I noticed Carioca's face was surprisingly grim. Her eyes kept flickering towards Hector as she banged the boxes about in pent-up fashion. Jonathan worked on carefully, dismantling the more delicate pieces, wrapping the parts in cotton wool.

Suddenly Carioca was striding across the floor towards us, glass crunching beneath her imperious tread. She stopped in front of Hector, hands on her hips.

'Well, just *what* have you got to say for yourself?'

'Eh?'

'You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. What excuse have you got for this...' she waved a hand at Hector's mobiles, 'this *apology* for a display? This exhibition cost me a small fortune and what do you do? You show this *junk*. There's not an honest emotion in any single piece! You're an old *fraud*. My *God*. I ought to *sue* you!'

'Take it easy, Carioca,' I said. 'The show's over now, and Jonathan did well.'

'But that's just the point!' she shrilled. 'He *didn't*. He didn't sell one single solitary piece—and no wonder! The place is so full of garbage that people laughed! They all said Jonathan's creations were *wonderful*, of course, but they wouldn't buy, because this old fool dragged down the whole tone of the exhibition! He turned it into a cheap *bazaar*!'

Eventually she became aware that Jonathan had carried

out the last of the boxes and showed no sign of returning, then at last she stormed off. Hector looked at me, stricken.

'How can my son live with that?' he whispered.

FOUR

FOLLOWING the exhibition, it was apparent to most of us that the liaison between Jonathan and Carioca would shortly be ended—although nobody could have anticipated the fairy-tale manner in which this would occur. I saw Carioca once or twice in the next few days and she mentioned, several times, that she had lost a considerable amount of money in the venture. She also said that Jonathan had sold a few mobiles as a result of the publicity; I didn't like to ask if their business arrangement covered such contingencies.

One very significant thing she said. In a few days' time she was going to collect Wilberforce the land shark from Miranda Marshbanks...

I visited Hector one day and found him sunk in gloom; since his failure at the exhibition he had become more of a recluse than ever. He took some time answering the door and when at last I got inside the house, I found the mobiles still in their cardboard boxes. He hadn't had the heart to unpack. I tried to cheer him up by telling him about Carioca's significant decision. He brightened a little.

'You say Jonathan hates the brute? That figures. He never did like fish.'

He glanced towards Jonathan's shack; and I knew what he had been doing these past few weeks. Immersed in self-pity, he was nevertheless too compulsive an artist to abandon his work entirely. So he had worked in the studio of his lost son, pouring the genius of his despair into one single, terrible mobile—the small monstrosity I had seen the other night. A brilliant work, but unsaleable... 'When does that woman collect the shark?' he asked.

'Tuesday ... Look, Hector. Don't read too much into it...'

I saw Jonathan on the sea wall later that day, hot and

furious as he struggled beneath Carioca's jacked-up hover-car trying to fix some obscure fault. Carioca stood looking down at his twitching legs. 'You poor dear,' she was saying.

I paused. 'What's the trouble?'

'Joe, it's too frustrating. Three times I've had it fixed and the same thing happens. Without warning, the *wretched* car starts to plunge about like a *dolphin*. It's too frightening. Really, I suspect the garage sabotages it deliberately, to make work for themselves.'

'Leave it here. I'll give you a ride back, then I can send Dave Froehlich to take a look at it.'

Jonathan extricated himself gratefully and Carioca, with a display of girlish playfulness which I found nauseating, hauled him to his feet. Then, instead of climbing straight into my car, she fawned over him for a few minutes, straightening his tie, brushing dirt from his jacket, licking her handkerchief and dabbing at a patch of oil on his cheek. Jonathan took it all stoically.

It wasn't until I was driving them away that I discovered the motive behind all this wifeliness. Watching it from his seat on an upturned dinghy was Hector Bartholomew.

We all have our motives, and my motive in making myself pleasant to Carioca Jones has always been the expectation of future profits. She is well acquainted with the wealthier element on the Peninsula and is in the habit of sending me good customers for my various slitheskin products—which are not cheap. That was how I let myself in for the job of having her car fixed, which proved to be more complicated than expected. On Tuesday it was still sitting in my yard—Dave having towed it there—awaiting a spare set of primary blades from the manufacturer.

So, on the Tuesday morning, I drove Carioca and Jonathan to the kennels. We arrived just after ten.

'Oh...' said Carioca.

Hector Bartholomew was there, chatting to Miranda Marshbanks and Rosalie. He held a box and I assumed that his excuse for calling was to collect her mobile for tuning. Rosalie saw us; her eyes remained on Jonathan and I felt

pretty sick as the lad walked across the grass with Carioca hanging on to him. I followed uncertainly.

Miranda Marshbanks came trotting towards us and Rosalie resumed her work; there were a large number of land sharks in the arena today. Hector remained standing irresolutely on the far side behind the row of kennels, a lonely figure.

'Hello, Carioca dear,' gushed Miss Marshbanks. 'So nice to see you ... And Jonathan Bartholomew, quite a stranger these days. I haven't had a chance to tell you what I thought of your *enormously* successful exhibition last week. Well, well ...' She let it hang there, so we never did learn what she thought of the exhibition.

Carioca's jaw was set. 'Thank you, darling. I'm so glad you liked it; one gets so few cultural events on the Peninsula, it's such a pity. So many of us *talk* about art, it was really a pleasure to *do* something about it. But we must run, Joe was so kind to bring us and we can't hold him up. So fetch Wilberforce, will you?'

'Rosalie!' called Miranda. The girl nodded and made for a kennel on the far side; through the bars I saw the sinister shape of Wilberforce. Miranda prattled on and I watched the girl. She seemed to be having trouble with the latch; the shark was rattling the bars, Hector hovered near and I think we all sensed something was wrong as we leaned against the fencing and looked across the width of the arena.

Then the grille swung open and Wilberforce bounded out with jaws agape. Rosalie, stepping back, stumbled and went down; the shark was upon her instantly, a black thrashing devil tearing at the pale flesh of her leg. She stumbled to her feet, kicking, but the shark held on. Blood splattered, sprayed across the grass as the shark shook its flat head; and Rosalie was down again.

Someone was screaming. Miranda Marshbanks threw open a gate and we ran into the arena; Miranda carried some kind of rifle.

Before we could reach the struggling forms something even more terrible happened, something I had read about but never seen. Something which reminded us all what we tend to forget; that the only factor which distinguishes our

domestic pets from their wild counterparts is a tiny oxygenator and a veneer of training. From all over the arena the land sharks came, scenting blood, converging on the struggle, wriggling nearer like fat snakes. Wilberforce thrashed, Rosalie tore herself momentarily free, and blood splattered the nearest sharks. They sprang forward instantly.

Then they went into a feeding frenzy.

I heard Carioca screaming, saw her snatch the rifle from the irresolute Miranda.

Rosalie was stumbling away, surrounded by sharks; at least two hung from her leg as she swayed, dragging them behind. All around her sharks fought one another, smooth black skins livid with crimson gashes. Above the screaming of the women and Jonathan's urgent shouting I could hear the terrible slobbering and gulping of the sharks as they consumed one another voraciously. Wilberforce was on his back, some distance from Rosalie now; the centre of the second group of sharks who fought over his weakening body and tore at his belly and at one another.

And it was towards this second group that Carioca ran, holding the gun...

'Let him go, you bastards! Let him go!' she screamed uselessly; and she had wasted a couple of shots into the mêlée before Jonathan reached her and seized the gun. She hung on. 'What are you trying to do, you fool?' she shouted.

'They've got Rosalie!'

Carioca jerked at the rifle. 'But she's only a...' Her mouth shut suddenly and she seemed to collapse within herself, and she looked older, older even than her years. Jonathan took the rifle and ran to Rosalie.

I was beside Carioca, kicking the fish aside as I assisted her from the arena. I heard the rifle crack several times. Carioca slumped to the grass outside the fence; she had a deep cut on one leg. I found a stick and ran to help Miranda Marshbanks, who was thrusting at the fighting sharks with a garden fork, trying to separate them. Jonathan passed me, carrying the inert form of Rosalie. His face was blank as he handed me the gun.

A sudden revulsion overcame me and I put two shots into

a barracuda which was watching me harmlessly from under a bush. The fish were quietening down now; Wilberforce lay motionlessly and a row of sharks fed peacefully on his entrails like sucking pigs. Miranda stumbled past me, making for the gate; I followed. She was sobbing noisily and I wondered if she was insured against this sort of occurrence.

Jonathan was kneeling beside Rosalie on the grass, his arm under her shoulders, supporting her head with his other hand. She was conscious, and although her face was white with pain and loss of blood, I saw her smile before she fainted and went limp. I ran to the house and the ambulette touched down within five minutes. Jonathan accompanied Rosalie to the hospital.

The fairy-tale aspect didn't strike me until later in the week when I caught sight of Jonathan and Rosalie walking along the sea-wall one evening; she was limping slightly and he had his arm around her, bending towards her solicitously. They didn't even see me as they passed. I met Rosalie alone the next day and she told me Jonathan was living with his father again—and in a few days Rosalie would move in there too, just as soon as her sentence was up. Then she would marry Jonathan, the prince who had saved her from the dragon Wilberforce. Hector Bartholomew's flair for happiness mobiles had returned simultaneously with Jonathan, she told me proudly...

Yesterday the mailman brought me a mobile, a present from Hector.

Carioca Jones came to see me this morning. The wicked queen was recovering well from the loss of her protégé and her pet, and was talking gaily of suing Miranda Marshbanks. She wanted me as a witness to the carnage at the kennels. I showed her the mobile, switched it on and she was entranced. She remained silent, enraptured, for all of five minutes while the machine dispensed its Bartholomew brand of sentimental delight in sound and colour.

'Well!' she gasped as we went outside again. 'That was incredible, Joe. Of course, poor Hector was so crabby before, no wonder his mobiles were no good. *Much* better

now that Jonathan is living there again. Dear Jonathan ... He's quite an inspiration.' She glanced at me, then looked away again. 'Maybe everything's worked out for the best. Er ... Perhaps it's better to forget the whole affair, eh, Joe? Forget about Miranda. I won't sue.'

Happily ever after. The emotion mobile had done its work, as I'd known it would.

It wouldn't work for me, of course. I went into the house and it was still flashing and winking and whining there, and I kept seeing in it the face of a poor terrified girl, so I switched it off. It gave me the creeps. I'm glad Carioca didn't want me as a witness.

I wouldn't like to have to explain how I saw dear old Hector Bartholomew, shrewd judge of human nature, stand behind the cage and frighten the land shark into desperation so that it would attack the no-account S.P. girl when she opened the trap. So that the land sharks would go into a feeding frenzy and Carioca—that poor stupid bastard of a woman—would inevitably do the wrong thing ...

It takes a judge of nature to work all that out; a clever designer, a man who can weave dreams from metal and glass and paint, a calculating artist who knows how to juggle the emotions. A fast worker too; but just for an instant I'd recognised that dreadful, sinister little mobile as he retrieved it from the rear of Wilberforce's cage and slipped it back into the box ...

Conceived in sorrow and desperation, that mobile had been instrumental in bringing happiness back to Hector Bartholomew. And if that's not a fairy-tale ending I don't know what is.

THE DAY THEY CUT OFF THE POWER

by

VERA JOHNSON

This story should strike responsive chords in the minds of a good percentage of the readers of New Writings in SF and appeal to them on a very personal basis. The effect of the story on many other readers will, I fancy, produce something a little stronger than a polite lifting of the eyebrows. And, if the future as portrayed by Vera Johnson is horrific, then the reaction to that future, also portrayed, indicates that even horror can be faced and met and overcome.

THE DAY THEY CUT OFF THE POWER

I GOT a lift from Geneva to London with Arnold Travers. Five of us sardined into his 1998 Yamaha. Twelve years had crimped the fenders, chipped the chrome, wrecked the shock absorbers. Still, it ran.

They stopped us as we started into the extension chunnel. Special chunnel traffic pollies. Chupos, for short. Blowing whistles and holding up white-gloved hands. Official.

Arnold pressed a button and his window slid down. 'What's the trouble?' he asked. I was in the back, in the middle. I slouched down so the chupo wouldn't notice me. Pollies make me nervous. Any pollies, even chupos. Ever since the Paris demo in 2008 when the fleeks came at me with clubs.

'Accident up ahead,' the chupo said. A French accent. That made me even more nervous. France has the worst state pollies. France, then Spain, then Italy, then Greece. That's what they say, anyway. The roberts are the only others I've come up against and they're not nearly as bad as the fleeks. 'We'll let you know when it's cleared.'

So we had to wait an hour while they dragged away the broken cars and bodies. We didn't mind. It gave us a chance to talk quietly instead of shouting down the motor.

Arnold held a package towards me, saying, 'Cigarette, Brian?' I was surprised. And disgusted. I guess my face showed it because he started laughing. I grabbed the package. Sure enough, they were fakes, made of chocolate. But authentic-looking, the brand my old lady smoked. Lung-rotters, we called them. Nobody under twenty was stupid enough to use them. Most of us had tried a water-pipe once or twice, but that was different. And we soon learned there

were easier ways to enjoy the herb. In stews. Or fudge or cookies. At the tobacco shops they gave away free cigarette papers with every purchase of cannabis, but the only thing we ever used them for was to blow music through a comb.

I took out two cigarettes and gave Arnold the package.

'Hey, these are expensive,' he complained.

I smiled. 'Well, you offered them.' I ripped off the paper and stuck them in my mouth. We all laughed at his rueful expression.

I didn't know Arnold very well. Or the rest of them, for that matter. They were younger than I. Maybe sixteen or seventeen. All hyper over their first SFD convention. Not like me, an old pro. Eighteen. Chairman of Students for Democracy at Essex University.

This was my third year as a delegate, and the most exciting. The exciting bits didn't get into the papers. We had seen to that, barring the press from the crucial sessions. But they would find out before long. As soon as the Easter vacation was over.

We talked about the convention. The speeches, the debates. The people.

'I like that Greek girl who spoke just before you did yesterday,' Arnold said. 'A real brain.'

'Yeah,' said Timothy. 'Nice teeters too.'

Jasper agreed. 'Bouncy,' he said.

They were pretty juvenile. I laughed, just to be polite. And after a while the cars started moving. The chupo pointed a white baton at us. Meaning get going.

We came out of the chunnel into the late afternoon traffic. Nightmare of speeding cars, fumes, blaring horns. Everybody in England must have gone to the continent for the Easter weekend. Now they were all frantic to get home. Looking at the cars threatening to ram us as they changed lanes, I remembered that somebody in Geneva had told me about an organisation called the New Luddites. I asked Arnold if he had heard of them.

He hadn't. 'Are they like the old Luddites, out to smash machines?'

'Not all machines. Just automobiles and aeroplanes.'

We had to agree they were on the right track. Every day the Minister of Pollution announced deaths from emphysema, bronchitis and other diseases affected by air pollution in the London area. Every day the figure was higher.

Only once had it gone down. That was after they set up the proscribed zones. No private vehicles allowed, only buses and taxis. For two weeks there were fewer deaths each day. Then the total started climbing again.

'I don't suppose they'll get anywhere, a small group like that,' I said. 'But it must be a good feeling to take direct action.'

Brmm-pow! Automobiles spewing nuts and bolts and twisted metal all over the road. And a few last feeble fumes. Curling upwards. Like incense, towards heaven. I could just see it.

'Maybe I ought to get rid of the car right now,' Arnold said. 'We could walk the rest of the way.'

He started to slow down. We knew he was just pranking around but we shouted protests. He laughed and speeded up again.

Arnold lived at Stepney, which was in a prozone, so he had to use a garage at Plaistow. That's where we separated. I caught the tube, switched to the Northern Line at Charing Cross and got to Tooting Bec by eleven.

Mom and Dad were watching holovision, as usual. Glasses of beer beside them. Dad puffing away on a pipe. She had a lungrotter dangling from her lip, a long ash ready to fall. Air heavy with acrid smoke.

'Hello, Brian,' said Dad. 'Had a good conference, did you?'

'Yes, thank you.' I headed for the bedroom.

'Well, don't forget to let me know when the revolution's going to start. I'd hate to miss it.'

I slammed the door behind me. But that was stupid. He didn't mean any harm. He just liked a joke. I opened it again and said, 'Sorry. My hand slipped.'

They didn't even hear me. Looking into the holly screen I saw a man stumbling across a dusty desert while ominous music sounded. Oboes, I think. Mother was right there with him. Thirst clawing at her throat. She reached for her glass

of beer. I carried the phone into my room and shut the door. Gently, this time.

Benjy first. 'Sorry to be phoning so late but I've got to report to the executive tomorrow.'

Six o'clock at night, we decided. The usual place. We didn't mention the name. You could never tell when the Roberts would start bugging the line.

I called the others. Jennifer, Nalan, Vic. Each of them would phone one other. All of us except one lived in London. Luckily. Dru would have to come from Wolverhampton.

I was in bed by midnight, but not asleep. Too much on my mind. This time SFD was going to hit the establishment hard. Oh, we had done it before. In 1993 at McGill, 2005 in Cambridge, 2006 at Berkeley. And 2008 in Paris. (Only there they hit us harder.) But these were isolated incidents. Small-scale. This time every college in the United States of Europe was involved. And with us setting the example, it could spread even farther.

For five years the cost of living had been going up up up. We pleaded for increases in the student stipends. We threatened. We demanded. The stipends stayed the same. Just like the old-age pension.

But there was a difference. We weren't old and battered by life. We had strength and energy. We weren't going to let them push us around.

The Bandolier was a restaurant in a prozone, not far from Euston. I enjoyed the walk from the station. No traffic to worry about, just the odd bus or taxi. Inside it was murky. Guttering candles in wine bottles. Old guns and swords, old musical instruments nailed or hung or glued to walls and ceiling.

Behind the counter, Poppa Dupree. A rebel, like us, but from another generation. An American who could never go back to Chicago. They had lifted his passport.

He was a big man. And black. Something like Grandpa Paine, my dad's father, only younger. Grandpa Paine had been a bus driver in Leeds. When he married a red-haired Bradford girl, the families on both sides were upset. Old-

fashioned racial prejudice—a bunch of nonsense, but there was still some of it around.

Grandpa had raised my dad to be a good boy, go to church every Sunday, work hard, keep yourself respectable. Don't get into trouble. Poppa Dupree looked like my grandfather, but inside he was different. Don't take any dirt, he told us. You can turn this world inside out. You got the power. You have to know you got the power and you have to learn how to use it.

I believed him. I believed we had the power. And that's what I told them when we were sitting at the long table in the corner. In the gloom. Leaning forward and looking into the half-shadowed faces.

'No more waiting,' I told them. 'The first day of the new term, we're taking over. Occupy the administration building, the lecture rooms, the works. Every university and college in the whole United States of Europe. And we're not moving until they increase the stipends.'

Everybody else was silent. Half-smiling. They could see it happening. There weren't enough polities in the whole U. S. of E. to stop us. We had the power.

Then came the questions. Where would we meet the first morning of the new term? What time? Who would phone all the SFD members? How many did we need to take over Admin? Some of us would go back to Wivenhoe a day early, we decided, and meet returning students at the station or the parking lot.

I was busy the next couple of days. Making phone calls. Rushing all over London to tell people things I didn't want to say over the phone. Drafting a manifesto that we could run off on the Multex machine once we'd taken over the office.

Then it was Thursday morning. The postman brought me a little printed card. From British Rail, Southern Region. They were holding a parcel for me at Balham station. Would I please come and collect it.

It was a small mystery and I was impatient, busy with other things and wanting to brush it aside. But what the hell. It wouldn't take me more than ten minutes to walk over. And the weather was good. Hawthorns in bloom,

warm spring smell in the air. But this wasn't a prozone. Christ no. If it weren't for the traffic lights I would never have been able to cross Balham High Road.

At the station a man led me to the left luggage office. 'Here we are.'

I stared at the trunk he indicated. My trunk. Which I had left at the university, stored in the basement, empty. I hefted it. It wasn't empty now. I found the little key on my ring and turned it in the lock. Inside was everything I had left in my room. Clothes. Books. Letters. Records. Somebody had cleaned out my room. Some stranger picking over my personal belongings, reading my mail.

'Do you want me to give you a hand with this?'

I didn't hear him at first. Still staring. Voices in my head clamouring who? who? who? And why? They were still clamouring when the cab-driver helped me ease the trunk into the elevator and when I manhandled it down the hallway of our apartment.

'What on earth?' said Mother.

'I don't know,' I said. 'I can't even guess.'

I phoned the university but there was no answer. Where should I try next? While I was wondering, the phone rang. It was Benjy. All his things had been returned. We checked with the other executive members. It had happened to all of them. Jennifer and Nalan and Vic and Owen and Mac and Irving and Dru.

Maybe they were trying to get rid of all SFD members. I hoped so, knowing the other students would rally to support us. We phoned a few members who were not on the executive. Yes, their stuff had been sent to them.

For a few minutes I convinced myself this was what had happened. I was already gloating over the hundreds of new members we would gain. Then Jennifer had the bright idea of calling some students who didn't belong to the SFD. Their belongings had been returned too.

'Well, somebody must know what's happened.' I was shouting at Jennifer. Angry. As if she was responsible. 'I'll phone the Ministry of Education.'

When I finally got through to them a woman said they

were very sorry. Nobody there could give me the information I wanted.

'You're sorry! What do you think I am?' I was ready to explode. More frustrated than angry. As if I was punching a bag that kept turning to marshmallows. I thought of the New Luddites. At least they knew what and where the enemy was. They could attack it.

It was Jennifer who suggested I call Mr. Kyriacou. 'He should know what's happening,' she said. 'And you're one of his favourites.'

I thought it would be easy to find him in the directory, but there was a whole column of Kyriacous called John or J. I tried them all. Well, not quite all. He was third from the bottom.

'Mr. Kyriacou? This is Brian Hepple.'

'Hello, Brian.' He had never lost his Greek accent. Even though he had left the country long before it joined the U.S.E. He was an old man now, at least forty. But he was different from most people. More like Poppa Dupree. 'What can I do for you?'

I explained what had happened and asked if he knew the reason. Long pause. Very long pause. Then a sigh.

'I do, Brian, but I'm afraid I can't tell you. Not until tomorrow.' He wouldn't. No matter how I pleaded. 'Sorry, Brian, but it's not my secret. You'll know soon enough. Can't you wait?'

I couldn't. I phoned the others and told them what he had said. Then I tried to get interested in holovision or a book. Nothing worked. I kept wandering in and out of rooms, restless. Driving Mother batty. Even Dad started to get nervous. He came home for lunch wearing his Electricity Board uniform. (He used to be a meter reader, but since they connected all the meters to a central computer five years earlier, all he did was collect tokens from the coin-in-the-slot meters.) I was pacing up and down.

'You remind me of somebody,' he said. Phoney look of concentration. Pretending he was trying to remember. I knew a joke was coming. 'Ah, I have it. The lion at Regent's Park Zoo.'

He could see I didn't think it was funny.

'Why don't you take a run down to Wivenhoe?' he said. 'I'll give you the train fare.'

So I went. The journey I'd made so many times before. To Colchester first, then Wivenhoe. Not knowing what I'd find at the end. A moist day. Not raining, but the sky was heavy.

I thought about Mr. Kyriacou and wondered why he had refused to tell me. He taught us political science, infusing us with his own enthusiasm, his own anger and passion. We left his lectures drunk on the glory of heroes who had been dead for decades or centuries. Weeping for martyrs.

I had belonged to the SFD for two years before I ever met Mr. Kyriacou. But he was the one who really convinced me you can change things. The world was so overcrowded, so polluted, so depleted of resources that there didn't seem to be much hope for humanity. A lot of older people had just given up.

But not the SFD. We believed in a kind of socialism that had never yet been tried. Anywhere. Not the dogmatism of the splinter socialist groups. Not the lukewarm timidity of the Labour Party. We believed in something bigger than that. All part of one big family. Each entitled to his share of food. And clothes. And a job. And the right to do and say whatever he wanted, as long as he didn't hurt anybody.

I took a taxi to the university. People swarmed over the grounds. Surveyors peering through instruments as if they were taking pictures. Men unloading lumber. Bricks. Bags of cement. An enormous digging machine sinking its teeth into the lawn. People looking at blueprints. I passed them, walked into the building where I lived. Up the stairs to my room.

The door was locked. I tried my key but it didn't work. They had changed the lock. That was when I realised something final had happened. Something irreversible. I knocked.

A strange woman with a baby in her arms. 'Yes?'

I couldn't say: 'What the hell are you doing in my room?' I said I was looking for a Mr. Anderson. (That was my next door neighbour, another SFD member.)

'Sorry, I never heard of him. I just moved in the day before yesterday.'

'Are you a student?'

She frowned. 'Do I look like a student?'

'Well, could you tell me how you happened to move here?'

She didn't answer for a moment. Thinking it was none of my business. Then she shrugged. 'The Council arranged it. I was squatting in Camden Town. Then they told me I could have a place here.'

It was a dismal trip back to London and dark by the time I arrived. This time I didn't phone Mr. Kyriacou. I went around to his home. One of a row of terraced houses. (Like my dad used to say, 'semi-detached on both sides'.)

He frowned when he saw me. 'You shouldn't have come.' Still, he asked me in, poured me a glass of sherry.

I told him what I'd seen. 'It's crazy,' I said. 'If the school's closing down, where are they going to send us? And why does it have to be such a big secret?'

'So you won't have a chance to protest and stop it, I guess,' he said. 'I might as well tell you now. All the schools are closing down.'

I couldn't believe it. 'All the schools? All the schools in England?'

'Not just England. The whole U.S.E.'

'But what—but how—?'

He told me. It would be something like the Open University. All the students sitting at home and watching lessons on old-fashioned TV sets provided by the Ministry of Education. Only you wouldn't have to stick with any one class or grade. Watch whatever programmes interested you, write exams whenever you felt ready for them. A revolutionary experiment in education.

Then he went on. 'And it will solve all our economic problems. No more housing shortage—all the buildings will be turned into apartments. Except the nursery schools. They will stay the same. High-rises will be built on the grounds. No more unemployment. Everybody will be busy in construction or making TV sets and ear-plugs or producing programmes.'

Mr. Kyriacou talking like this. Phoney bureaucratic propaganda. I wanted to call him fink! traitor! But I felt too sick to say anything.

Then he laughed.

'Don't look so worried. I'm just telling you what the official line is. You don't have to swallow it.'

That made it even worse. Knowing what they were doing to us, he laughed.

'You know the real reason,' I shouted. 'This is one more way to split us up, divide us. We're too radical for them. Too committed. And what good will it do to build a few more houses? You know it's the whole foundation of society that's rotten. You should have warned us so we could stop them with sit-ins.'

I wasn't feeling sick any more. Just mad.

'Yes,' he said. 'I thought about it. But I decided to let the system go ahead and dig its own grave.'

Maybe he could have explained that to me, but I didn't give him a chance. I was still angry when I left. How were we going to keep the SFD alive? All of us huddled in separate little cells. No school registers to put us in touch with potential members. No common rooms where we could hold meetings. It looked as if we were finished.

I kicked at a lamp-post. Then I had to grit my teeth until the pain subsided. When it did, I realised I was being stupid. What I should be doing was thinking of how we were going to cope with the new situation.

Where were we going to find new members? Out in the streets, that was where. They wouldn't be spending all their time huddled over the box. They would be visiting the parks. The pubs. The theatres. The book stores. And we'd be there too, handing out newsletters advertising meetings or asking them to get in touch with us. If we didn't have common rooms to gather in, we'd meet outside. Hyde Park. Trafalgar Square. We could use telephone chains to keep in touch.

I thought of watching Mr. Kyriacou on a TV screen and I remembered what he had said—'let the system dig its own grave.'

I began to realise the possibilities. In two years—maybe

less, if we worked hard—some of us could be qualified teachers ourselves, reaching hundreds of thousands with our ideas instead of just the handful in a classroom.

I almost laughed out loud, thinking what a mistake they had made. They weren't cutting off the power. They were putting it in our hands. I couldn't wait to tell the others.

And thinking of all the work that had to be done, I started to run. There was no time to waste.

A TIME OF MIND

by

KEITH WELLS

Changing a habit of thought that has hardened over the years is notoriously difficult to accomplish, and the result can be exceedingly painful. When Jako had thought his way through all the verses, it must have been very clear to him that no different result would have been obtained had he chosen the OBVERSE ...

A TIME OF MIND

*'The outer structure of the Self is called Language
A network web of points in consciousness
Which may all be inhabited by the shapeless, formless
Light
Of which we are all a part.'*

'WAY OUT on the Edge like that, what else can we do?'

'Why bother?'

'Because we have to. Don't ask me why. It must be done.'
The Chairman stood up slowly, his heavy robes falling into smooth lines. The Secretary backed away and stood beside an astrolabe at the window.

'All space,' he murmured softly, 'all wide space and we keep going on.'

The Chairman crossed to the window and looked out at the first purple rays of their sun.

'The Festival's begun. Listen for the bellbirds.'

The Secretary pushed open the window and they listened quietly until it came, the first flute soft notes of the bellbirds—who never sang alone—their notes always in rippling chimes from a thousand directions.

'This is the most beautiful planet in the Multiverse,' declared the Chairman. 'Go and prepare for the Opening.'

The Secretary bowed and left the room. As he walked across the stone parapet from the Chairman's Tower to the Secretariat the full force of the bellbirds song pealed about him, washing away all his fears of the Edge and centring him in the beauty of the multiversal moment. All the bellbirds rang and he was all of them. Being from a thousand

directions; and in each of them he felt the crowds stirring, each bell chime containing a hundred thousand other awarenesses. A Multiverse.

The Festival of Maya Multos was the climax of the Divine Year, the Rainbow Day. During the course of the day, the light changed from purple to blue, green, yellow, orange, red and then infra red. Each colour repeating twice within the cycle. Noon, the period when the light went from infra-red all the way over to ultra-violet was the most sacred point in spacetime, and the sole reason for the choice of Maya Multos as the site for the Administrative Centre of the Galaxy.

As the Secretary entered the Great Hall he saw three or four Allmen seated by the fire, only Jako was awake.

'The others have the bellbird dream,' he said, nodding to his companions.

'I have just had it too,' murmured the Secretary. 'We're all of us pious.' He grinned abruptly. 'What do you want to know, Jako?'

The Allman at the fireside smiled. 'Who is going to Monos?'

'I can't tell you that.'

'Why do they have to go?'

'No reason that I can tell you. At least not yet. The Chairman will address the Duma.'

'He'll declare the Call.'

'He has no choice.'

They fell silent.

The first Sesta or part of the Maymultine Day, the purple Sesta, was spent entirely in song. The bellbirds began and they were superseded at the Opening by the shimmering tones of the organbirds which later gave way to the multi-larks orgasmic soul song, the release of all feeling in the soaring delight of its ecstasy. By then the sky had turned from purple through blue and the people prepared for the green Sesta, the Sesta of Deliberation, the time of discussion in the Duma.

A thousand delegates attended in person, though every

being in the multiverse partook of all events. The Chairman sat in the bronze chair and began as soon as the bellbird peal was sung.

'I'll be brief and frank with your Allness. Someone must go to Monos. I Declare the Call.'

None of the delegates moved a muscle, but the Chairman's mind was invaded and investigated by every mind in the Hall. He felt as though mercury had been poured down through his head and set solid in his jaw. Then they left as One and he was among them again.

'It's true,' said Jako, Speaker of the Duma. 'He has the Call. We can all see that—but what is the Call? Why must we always obey it?'

There were murmurs of agreement and discontent among the delegates, but they quietened down when the Secretary stepped forward and addressed them.

'If we knew what Jako is asking we would be Masters of the Multiverse ... as it is, we are only its Administrators. We are totally determined beings. The Call is our connection to Heaven. It is the thing in the Multiverse which is singular. Only the Chairman has it, whoever he may be. It shares no other quality with our existence. Only by obeying can we ever hope to contact its source.' There was much applause.

Jako waited 'til the Secretary sat down before he announced a vote. The light board blazed green under the green sky and the Chairman moved a formal vote of grace to the Monos Volunteer.

As the members of the Duma filed silently out under the green sunlight the Secretary plucked Jako's sleeve and made the ritual sign for Converse. Jako was surprised, for although Converse was known and even common among the citizens of Maya Multos, it was habitually used only between individuals and their pets, usually musical dogs with whom Converse took the form of a duet. Otherwise, the Multiversal populace lived, thought and acted as One. There was nothing singular, everything existed as everything else. Between people the only Converse was between the Chairman and his Secretary.

Jako returned the sign, two fingers held in a V and followed the Secretary into a grove of Moulang trees, serene and comforting in the rustling of their numberless leaves. The Secretary led Jako to a stone bench beneath a spray of Moulang branches.

'We shall have green thoughts,' laughed Jako, staring at the emerald grasses. To his surprise the Secretary made the sign of Secret Converse to the trees about them, and Jako was forced to do likewise, extending both hands with V fingers. At this ancient sign the Moulang trees withdrew and the grasses and the bench until Jako and the Secretary were in solitary Converse, the strangest place in the Multiverse.

'I am sorry,' said Jako, 'You must go into Converse often with the Chairman. I've never been here before. It's unreal, nothing else exists here, just the two of us!'

'Exactly,' said the Secretary, unsmiling.

Jako took hold of himself. 'There are many things in All,' he said, and the Text pulled him back into the seriousness of the situation. 'Forgive me. What is it that you have to tell me?'

The Secretary's stern features cracked into a smile. 'You guessed already, you knew at once why I brought you here. For the experience itself. To show you this place exists, the Converse.' He paused while Jako tried to grasp the significance of this statement. 'First the Multiverse—then here—the Converse.'

'And then . . . ?' asked Jako in a breathless whisper, a rush of horror at the possibilities.

'Who knows?' said the Secretary guardedly, and glancing at his gaunt face Jako realised for the first time that there were things the Secretary knew which Jako did not. The concept was unheard of. All knew All, because All WERE All. Secrets were unknown where identity was infinitely interchangeable. But now, this place, where All were only two, and yet somehow didn't fit.

'I don't see through you,' stammered Jako.

'Nor I you,' replied the Secretary, and at once Jako knew it to be true. This Converse state was murky and obscure, the Allness was reduced to twoness and somehow became

unclear. He looked deep into the Secretary's eyes and the Allness flowed again, and as his gaze deepened Jako came to a place within the Secretary's mind where he had never been before. As he gazed he seemed to pass into the Chairman's office; an empty chair, an astrolabe, a bare desk. In an alcove the Chairman sat beside a beautiful woman, and somehow Jako knew that although he couldn't enter it, the Chairman and the woman were also in a state of Converse with each other. He knew also that the woman was the call which was always sacred.

But he felt no awe or fear, just a calm acceptance until he remembered the Secretary and remembering that he was within his gaze, fell into confusion and seemed to hurtle downward 'til he landed with a sudden start to find a golden lotus growing on a beach in yellow sunlight. His gaze shifted and he became aware of the Secretary's eyes again, remote, calm. Then the Secretary dissolved also into a golden lotus glowing on a beach and out of the sea came all the creatures of creation . . . molluscs and shellfish spreading into crabs and legs replacing suction pods and the birth of sight and hearing . . . the first dry touch—the scurf and claw of battle, the huddle for warmth . . . the tender young. And out of the six legged came the four legged and out of the four legged came the two legged, and pincer became claw, became hoof, paw and hand . . . instinct grew into idea, then thought, brain and mind and all became a field of golden lotuses glowing on a beach.

When the vision had passed the Secretary said. 'You will volunteer for Monos. You'll be transmitted at Noon. The important thing is to keep contact. Think of the golden flower I have just shown you and I'll be in touch with you.'

'The others, do they?'

'No!' said the Secretary shortly. 'There have been difficulties in communication. They cannot reach us.'

'Or we cannot reach them,' retorted Jako. The Secretary looked sideways at Jako who realised once again how opaque the state of Converse is . . . and how easy it was to see the concealed spaces in the Secretary's mind, secret

hoards of awareness, guarded from Allness, to which it belonged. And yet he could not see what those guarded spaces concealed. Text Twenty-Seven jumped into his mind. 'If Allness cannot perceive, that it cannot contain—for it contains All that it perceives, and perceives all that it contains.' But here was something Jako could not perceive . . .

His mind stopped at the dizzy brink as the Secretary held out his hands in the mudra of welcoming Allness, and the Moulang trees swept around them and the blue-green grasses flowed under their feet and the stone bench resumed its slow dance beneath them.

Jako was back in the Multiverse.

The green time after the Deliberation of the Duma was always spent in silence on Maya Multos. A time of tranquillity before the rejoicing of the Yellow Sesta when Everything danced the Atomic Spin.

Jako sank himself into the Allness with loving gratitude. He became all the people of his beautiful planet, and all the silent birds and breathing grasses, yet somewhere, somehow, something interrupted the flow of it. He felt like a stone in the river, part of the rushing current caught in a slower time. The rock rushes into sand and out to sea far slower than the water, slower than the fishes or the plants, but the rock flows, thought Jako. At once the idea spread from his mind into all things and rejoiced there as a gift of the Deliberation. But Jako knew he had given birth to the new thing. 'The Rock Flows' became the Thirty-Third Text, but Jako knew it as the first. In time he came to see it as his first faltering step towards Monos.

Having no experience of singularity, Jako made no other preparation for his departure. Having ascertained that he was capable of giving birth to unique thought absolved him of all worry about the future and he lost himself in the Allness of the Atomic Spin like the giddiest of young molecules.

After the Dance Jako went to the Fountains for refreshment. Again the Secretary flashed the Converse signal and Jako unhesitatingly returned it. At once he felt a surge of

confidence through him and knew he could manage it somehow.

This time the Secretary led him to a small tower set in one corner of the formal parks and woodlands that surrounded the city towers. Inside there was a large hall and a winding stair that led up to the Tower.

The Secretary smiled, folding his hands in his robe like a novice monk.

'The Rock Flows,' he said, 'That was very good. Now this one will undoubtedly shock you—but there's no other way. You must do exactly as I tell you.'

Jako nodded.

'Walk up those stairs.' Jako did as he was told, feeling the flowing stones through his feet, following its slow spiral. At the top was a small square room with windows on all sides and a transparent dome. Jako scratched his ear and waited. A bellbird landed on the window ledge.

'REVERSE!' The Secretary ordered.

At once the bellbird flew backwards off the window-ledge, Jako scratched his ear and then unfalteringly reversed all his actions, coming backwards down the stairs, backed into the room and looked back at the Secretary who said,

'Stairs those up walk.'

Nodded Jako.

'You tell I as exactly do must you. Way other no there's but—you shock undoubtedly will one this now. Good very was that.'

Abruptly the sensation passed. Motion halted as in the heart of the Atomic Spin and then Jako was in open Converse with the Secretary again and Time was going forward once more and the Secretary was saying, 'There! Don't you see—it was in the language all the time. The Engloid root.'

'I don't understand,' said Jako. 'What happened?'

'Reverse,' said the Secretary. 'We exist now solely in the Converse, right?'

'Right,' agreed Jako feeling the twoness between them.

'Very well, if we can move from the Multiverse into the Converse, what's to stop us from entering the Reverse?'

'I just did!' exclaimed Jako, and the sensation of singularity flowed over him with chilling awareness.

'And of course, the Secretary continued, 'If reality exists through language—a hidden root, earlier than Engloid, than Englitch even, the oldest language in the Multiverse...'

The Secretary stopped in confusion.

'The Reverse,' prompted Jako. 'Is it only here—in this tower?'

'No. It seems to be anywhere. So far I have only attempted it in Converse with the Chairman, but there's no reason to suppose it does not exist tangentially to the Multiverse.'

'You mean—our whole civilization could be Reversed?'

'Precisely. If the word spread, entire sequences of creation could be Reversed. You see now why I have secretly initiated you into Converse.'

'But what has Monos got to do with it?'

'Who knows?' said the Secretary with some agitation. 'The obsession with Hermitages is something the Chairman and Jela brought back from their own Converse. Every new inhabitable planet that is discovered must be settled immediately with one man.'

'But why?'

'Out of the Multiverse you have come into the Converse, and from here I have shown you the Reverse. But remember that you went there in singleness.'

A strange terror clutched at Jako's throat, a black shadow that was hauntingly familiar.

'Singleness is the outcome of all our culture,' said the Secretary. "'The Many shall become One" as the First Text says. Hermitage is designed to create that One-ness. We will acquire individualness without sacrificing Allness.' He paused in his earnest tirade and then laughed to put his companion at ease.

'Remember the chiltale? The Myth of the Universe?'

Jako started. 'Surely you're not suggesting there could be a place. It's ridiculous!'

'"Chiltale is Lifestory",' quoted the Secretary and Jako seemed to see the familiar shadow again, and almost it spoke to him. He shuddered free of it and said,

'But the others who have gone ... they won't talk with you?'

'That was never said, but you have come to it through the polarity of this Converse. As you see, we are in an opaque place. There is no telling what the other really knows. But I'll tell you. We have sent out seventeen candidates for Hermitage, and none has remained in communication. Maybe they have found the Universe and are unable to return or contact us. You must keep in touch, Jako! Allness depends upon it!' And as he said the words the Secretary realised he'd left Allness far behind. Only the Chairman and his Jela knew these things, and the Hermits of course, and now Jako. But he too would soon change.

While they talked inside the Tower the light outside was changing from orange to red. The cause of the Maya Multos Rainbow Day was a large moon called Saturnos with coloured rings through which the sun's rays shone once per year. The red Sesta marked the approach of the infrared/ultra-violet switchover point, which was technically a full eclipse of the sun by the body of the moon Saturnos, before it passed again through the rings of light in the opposite order.

'The Day changes,' said Jako.

The Secretary nodded and they both made the mudra of loving Allness and went out into the Multiverse again.

As the Secretary closed the door Jako gave birth to the Thirty-Fourth Text, which came slowly as if through an undissipated mist of awareness. The Secretary had opened the door ... they had entered the tower and the Converse and Jako had ventured into the Reverse ... and now they were back. The Secretary closed the heavy wooden door and they returned to the Multiverse. It was as if the whole event had gone back on itself; entrance always followed by exit. The Reverse was with them all the time, a hidden part of everyday life ... the repeated pattern, the action that returned upon itself. 'The door closes before it opens,' said Jako and although only the Secretary fully understood him the thought spread out over the Red Sesta and was repeated constantly during the Struggle.

The Red Sesta was no longer an uneasy period. The conflicts that naturally arose at such a time had been ritualised in such a way that no being was hurt by it.

Enormous fires were lit as beacons on all the surrounding hills and the people rushed to the Central Beacon as fast as they could. It didn't matter who arrived first, the point was the amount of effort that was exerted. Everyone had to overstrain themselves, push out beyond the limits of their physical strength and control. Anyone who died from over exertion was considered a saint and included on the Rolls of the True Believers.

As soon as the sunlight turned scarlet they set off. The aged and crippled staggering at top speed along the rocky road while the young and fit ran all the way to the perimeter of the fire before running back down again and starting from scratch. On their last trip the strongest would pick up those who had fallen. All arrived in a state of utter exhaustion. All anger conflict and resentment was purged in the ordeal. The six strongest then went back to bring up the Chairman in his bronze travelling chair. The effort this cost was considered the supreme sacrifice to the Multiverse, the giving of All unto All. When the Chairman finally reached the Central Beacon the flames roared under the crimson sky and drenched the panting figures with bloody light. Gradually the sun slipped through a red shift into a total eclipse by Saturnos. As the light took on the strange quality of darkness at noon, of light in the absence of light, the stars appeared as a ghostly host of confederate suns. Then the knowing came into Allness that Jako, who had been one of those who carried the bronze chair, was to be transmitted to the newly discovered Hermitage of Monos.

The Court Astronomer stepped forward, a shadow of light in the bright darkness. He touched Jako on the right shoulder and gave him a heavy, richly bound copy of The Book. Jako was singled out of the Multiverse by the Astronomer's bony hand and the Allness flowed into the Court Astronomer in the Infra-Ultra Hour and he pointed to an exact point in the Cosmos. It seemed to Jako the Centre star of a three star belt, loneliness stole over him like a monstrous cloak and then he was being transmitted. The Allness

of the people of Maya Multos standing in sacred robes beside the glowing fires centred on the figure of the Court Astronomer, who shimmered with their power. One hand on Jako, the other on the planet of another star. He glowed against the darkness, more than ever just a shadow of light, a bright hazy shape amid shadows. For an instant the star flashed a response, a rainbow haze formed a ring around it and the feeling of rushing through space made all other men clutch their fists in the Mudra of Holding On. Then Jako's unnoticed shadow was gone and all thought of his existence was taboo until the Rainbow Sunset in seven Sestas time.

Jako sat silent as the sun rose over the desert. His third day on Monos. Today he must open The Book. Since Hermitage had first been ordained by the Call as the Sacred Way to colonise outlying planets the Hermits had always been provided with a copy of The Book. No-one else had ever seen it and Jako had often wondered what it contained. Now he sat beside his own copy, dimly hearing the awakening sounds of this alien planet.

The desert rustled with life. Streak lizards ran over the rocks and furmice scuttled out of their way. The silent whitebirds flickered over the desert emitting their strange execution ray and moving with all the careless aristocracy of the unchallenged predator. Kings of the food chain until age and weakened wings should feed them to the ants.

Jako knew he was invulnerable here, protected from all misfortune. He ate two molassos and a handful of buttons from the cactus. He liked the molassos best, small, sugary accretions like crystal nuts on the tips of a spiky bush. The cactii were bitter, but they were key foods, psychotropic gateways to the modes of being and perception peculiar to the planet of Monos. Before the effects of the cactii could overwhelm him, Jako went back to his meditation rock, sat down and opened the Book.

The first page read as follows, 'There is only one Multiverse.'

Jako's mind reeled from the suddenness of the attack. It was a total, blasphemous reversal of the Holy Credo. 'The

Multiverse are many, in the many are several, continuously being always, everywhere.'

He tried to repeat the Credo but the monstrous idea that the Multiverse was only a minor part of creation struck to the very core of his beliefs, snatched the central pivot from the structure of his ideas. He felt near the sudden collapse into madness, but his experiences with the Converse and the Reverse had prepared him for this realisation and he managed to contain his hysteria.

He thought of contacting the Secretary but the idea was repugnant to him. He had tasted forbidden knowledge and he guessed at once why none of the other hermits had troubled to make contact. Maya Multos was a state of mind they could never share again.

Jako turned his eyes to the desert and prepared to go out into the Allness of its forms. Then he became a bunch of sungolds growing beside a rock, then he was ant, streak lizard, furmouse and whitebird, reaching his being out into all forms of life. For a moment he felt a flood of relief that he was still in the Multiverse, still part of All and then . . . a big red-blue streak lizard ran towards him and he began to become it . . . and missed! Somehow the lizard slipped through his multi-connected mind and darted towards his face, tongue flickering.

Jako stared, unable to comprehend this movement outside of pattern. The streak lizard radiated such an intensity of individuality that Jako lost balance, slipped from all coordinates and crashed back into solitude. He opened The Book again and turned to the second page where he was amazed to read the words, 'Solitude is the Queen of Universal Contemplation.'

The word Universal left Jako speechless, yet it so accurately mirrored his present condition, unable to be anything other than himself. Universe—One-ness—an isolated Here-Now-ness of infinite singularity. It made no sense. Yet here he was cut off from everything and unable to resume co-terminous existence with the rest of the Multiverse. All was All, save for himself. He felt as though he were lost between his awareness of his own existence and his existence itself. In other words he was cast out from the Multi-

verse, fallen from shared grace into the dungeon of individuality.

From that point on, The Book was everything to Jako, and although he ate regularly of the Molassos and cactii the desert was forgotten as he slowly made his way into a world within himself of whose existence he had never even dreamed.

After a while the Book ceased to frighten him and he came to see it as an open, often witty construction of this new Order of Being. The Universe. He learned that there were different galaxies where non-parallel physical laws obtained, in some worlds light was slower than sound for example, or there were spectrum inversions. With such a variety of physical Constants, Consciousness differed widely between the Galaxies. To be sure, the Polyverse and the Multiverse had many things in common, as did the Universe and the Soliverse, but fundamentally the Cosmos was formed of non-communicating parts.

At last Jako came to the core of The Book;

'You are here alone, the single growing point of your cosmos in spacetime. All other Galaxy chains rely on your imagination for their existence. You are brought here as The Dreamer. The Universe is your toy, as you dream so in the cosmos shall it be. This is the Secret above all secrets. That which your heart discovers.'

For a brief moment he thought of contacting the Secretary, but things had gone too far for that. The Secretary was but a cog in a wheel, while Jako dreamed the circle from which the wheel was born. But as he watched the cosmos turning he became aware of other steps, other hands in the motion of the stars—of other dreamers in the dream.

Remembering there were Hermitages older than his own, his mind raced among the stars trying to find the hidden Centre of Events. The core of dreaming. Slowly his awareness changed, it was not that there were other dreamers in the dream, but that other dreams were dreaming him. The impact of this realisation shook him like a gale-flung rag. He was a dreamer dreaming of a dream in which he was

dreamt of by dreamers from his dream. Passively co-creating an active illusion.

And at last, within his dreaming, he discovered Orva, the Hermit of Solos who had been transmitted the year before. Orva pointed to his copy of The Book and said, 'Make it change!' And Jako dreamed he commanded The Book to change, so that when he re-opened it he saw a series of new chapter headings on the title page:

1. The Multiverse
2. The Converse
3. The Reverse
4. The Universe
5. The Adverse
6. The Perverse
7. The Subverse
8. The Controverse
9. The Diverse
10. The Inverse
11. The Extroverse
12. The Introverse
13. The Idioverse

Jako saw each of these as a total pattern of existence, a blueprint for creation. Each one the life pulse of a world. He looked again and Orvar was saying,

'Sonos, the oldest Hermit, has been on Discoveria for 350 years. He was the one who compiled the word banks.'

'Word banks,' faltered Jako.

'Of course. Word banks are dictionaries. Sonos played around with Multiverse, Converse, Universe for a while, as we're doing, then he decided they were only facets of reality so he set out to collect a word bank. Every word of Engloid he could gather. By the time Gompal, the second Hermit, had reached the same point in his own meditations ten years later, Sonos had finished. So Gompal compiled an older, Englitch version. They figured words to be the keys to a hidden reality. Understand the word "Multiverse" and yet exist within it, the same with the others. Hence there must be a secret key in every word, like something in the word "tree" which leads to "treeness". After all, the Engloid

/Englitch language is over a hundred thousand generations old.' Orvar laughed, and for a moment Jako saw him as he'd been when he was Court Librarian at Maya Multos before being transmitted to the Hermitage.

'It'll all make sense when you've read what you've got in The Book so far,' concluded Orvar. 'Remember, just yell "change" and the next lesson will appear.'

Orvar vanished and Jako lost himself in The Book once more, passing through a Dream History of the Cosmos, seen through the lenses of the changing Verses. In the Reverse he witnessed the whole of creation breaking down. Devolution from man to primate to fish, mollusc, amoeba, earth, water, gas. Stars flooding back into a Cosmic Egg of Pure Light. Hydrogen.

In the Universe he was alone.

The Adverse was a History of mistake and disaster—endless worlds of confusion and misery where everything went wrong.

The Perverse was a state of profound wrongness, of sick light and malevolent stars, of humanity warped by cruel Divinity. This state shaded into the Subverse where energy conspired against matter and consciousness.

There was even a footnote which read,

'No reference is made here to two states of being which should theoretically exist according to the word bank of the Ancient Englitch Speech. These are Freeverse and Blankverse, both of which have survived in fragmentary scripts from the forgotten past.'

On and on he went, experiencing the Wars of the Controverse—the contradictions of the Diverse and the Inverse—the expansion of the Extroverse and the swooping, soaring contemplation of the Introverse. And in this last state his mind at last began to find itself, hidden among its own creations, conspiring in its own existence. As he turned the page to the last chapter he knew that he had arrived at the core of Consciousness. That which dreams, that which awakens. That which contains all the other states within itself. The true Allness, the Idioverse, the limitless empyrean

of mental creation—the Consciousness beyond energy or matter. Whose name is MOHO.

Within the Idioverse Jako was an insubstantial, infinite thought. He considered the seventeen Hermits and they were all within him, other atoms of awareness, radiating infinite cosmologies of possible existence. Sonos was no more than a flash of an idea, and at the same time his idea contained all things. It was as if one word in a book could mean every other word in a language ... MOHO—the word/sound that contains all other meanings, possible and undreamt of.

The Hermits were no more than the germ of an idea, a flash of thought in the Great Mind of which the stars and galaxies were merely the electrodes, the computer terminals of the Idioverse.

And in an instant the thought of the Idioverse changed. The Cosmos disappeared, stars and galaxies vanished and in their place came another concept. Jako, Sonos, Maya Multos, the Multiverse and all the ramifications of the thought before were gone forever. The Idioverse changed utterly. Matter, Space, Energy and Time were no longer the ingredients of the Cosmic equation. If these things ever existed they vanished without trace. Through Jako's dream, the thought form had returned to the Mind which first projected it and so the Great Mind was free to think again.

THREE DEADLY ENIGMAS: V YEAR BY YEAR THE EVIL GAINS

by

BRIAN W. ALDISS

It would seem fair to suggest that the titling of these three latest enigmas could have been dictated by the numbering of the first of them—that number, thirteen, may very well have prompted thoughts of evil. Slightly longer this time, the enigmas take on a body, the substance proving conclusively that their journey has most certainly not died for lack of destination. However, thoughts of evil were clearly very far from Brian Aldiss's mind when he wrote that he wished to dedicate these three stories to: 'the memory of that fine Scots writer, Eric Linklater, a master of humour, prose and fantasy, who has just died. His writing delighted me in my youth, and my pen owes a great deal more to his than mere ink, or than mere ink can say.'

THREE DEADLY ENIGMAS: V
YEAR BY YEAR THE EVIL GAINS

WITHIN THE BLACK CIRCLE
KILLING OFF THE BIG ANIMALS
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE YOU DOING
IT?

XIII WITHIN THE BLACK CIRCLE

EVERY year of her life, she had invented something. The first invention she could remember was the separated-vision experience, conducted in bed with one eye above the blanket and one below. She had been four then.

Although she recalled that there had been inventions even before that age, the separated-vision experience had been so seminal that it obliterated its feeblers forerunners. Most of the later inventions owed something to the separated-vision experience, which had revealed to her and still continued to reveal—that if you took up certain positions you could receive dual and conflicting impressions of the universe.

For instance, I used to read a novel, *The Green Rat* by Michael Arlen, over and over again. It was the novel my mother was reading when she died. I came to associate the colour green with sickness and death—not with the colours of nature but with all that is unnatural. Gradually I came to formulate a colour-emotion code; that was another of my inventions.

Some of those inventions were harmful to my psychic

development, I believe, however much the inventiveness itself succoured me. I was very much an isolated child. My father did not live in the Kremlin with me.

Not to be tedious, I will instance only one more of my inventions, and that the greatest of them. It was of a profoundly religious nature.

So many of our family, my uncles and aunts and cousins, disappeared before I reached the age of puberty. People vanished from around me like shadows. I never understood what happened to them until much later. So it came about that, by the war years, I was in an isolated position, bereft of friends of my own age or of senior years. Only my old nurse was close to me. I used to stare for hours out of my window, over the crenellated walls of the Kremlin, gazing on the great world outside and wondering if it was all as boring there as here. Finally, my breath would mist the pane; the outside world would disappear.

In Moscow during the war years, there was a popular perfume available called 'Svetlana's Breath', to flatter my father. I used to laugh at that—what could be less effective, or more pathetic, more solitary?

Gazing from my little window, I formulated my religious theory. Stated briefly, it was that nobody ever died and no new people were ever born. Bodies decayed and had to be done away with, to be replenished by new babies, but the vital part, the soul (by which I meant the whole personality), lived on, translated into a fresh body.

Perhaps I was trying to console myself. When my older step-brother Yakov disappeared in the war, my religious theory came to my aid. I imagined him living elsewhere. The same with old friends, and with my aunts and grandparents, all of whom had disappeared from our gloomy little scene. They were elsewhere, happy.

As I imagined the process when I had perfected it, what happened was that the personality of someone loved would move to another body, perhaps a small child's, living in another part of the country, possibly even in a completely different part of the world. There, the personality would gradually shape the appearance and circumstances of the

new life until it came to resemble as closely as possible the old one.

For instance, Sergei Kirov, whom even my father had loved, and who had been shot in 1934, was still alive in a new body, somewhere where we should never see him again, but still enjoying life, still remembering me and my dear mother, in Sverdlovsk, or Irkutsk, or even Kazan or Khabarovsk.

Perhaps my mother was still alive, still young in a new body, looking just as I remembered her when I was a small girl, thinking of me yet in Paris, or even Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires.

You see how this belief was a development of the separated-vision theory, in a way. Given the right way of looking, you might get an entirely different view of the universe from everyone else. The things everyone regarded as real might be just illusions. I strove to perfect a way of viewing the real reality.

Maybe this all sounds preposterous; but my life-style contributed to such alienation. I lived one way outwardly, another inwardly. Our 'home' in the Kremlin was miserable, so that I was forced to recall happier times.

Ugh! That Kremlin apartment! My father rarely visited there. I was left alone with my faithful old nurse and the horrible domestic retinue, all of course in the employ of the OGPU or MGB. We were housed in the old Senate building, on the first floor, where a wide corridor had been converted into separate rooms. Those rooms still had sections of high vaulted ceiling, which plainly didn't belong. The interior walls were flimsy, the outer ones nearly five feet thick.

Father generally worked on the floor above; there were the offices of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and First Secretary of the Communist Party and other well-placed bureaucrats. I never went up there, except on one occasion in 1942, when Winston Churchill came to talk with my father. The truth was, I loathed the building and all the people in it.

Small wonder I tried to live back in the times when I was

a little girl and things had been happy. When my mother was alive, we used to go down to the Caucasus in the summer, when we'd all drive into the wilds and have great splendid picnics, often with Mikoyan, Voroshilov and Molotov and all their wives and children. Little we thought then of the terrible times that were to overtake us! My father would sometimes go shooting—mainly hares or hawks—quick, small things—but he was not a great hunter of animals.

He was surrounded by happy people in those days, people he trusted. All of that vanished when mother shot herself. He became colder and harder, year by year, and year by year the evil gained over him, while more treacherous and bestial people surrounded him, notably Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria. Towards the end of my father's life, say from the war years onwards, I felt that to be near him was like being on the slopes of a high mountain; the atmosphere was so chill, so sparse, that you had to fight for breath. The human spirit expired in his presence.

Once I had discovered how he drove my mother to suicide, relations between my father and me could never be cordial again. Nevertheless, something of that old Georgian warmth remained, even in wartime, even within that terrible black circle he had drawn round himself. We still used to see films together.

Right at the other end of the Kremlin was a small theatre, situated in what had once been the Winter Garden. My father and I would go there late at night, he muffled in his greatcoat, saying not a word, walking very slowly with me through the deserted courts. Sometimes, we heard the rumble of tanks in Red Square beyond the walls.

We never visited the cinema without an escort, even in the heavily defended Kremlin. We were accompanied by many members of my father's bodyguard, all well-armed, of course, and by two armoured cars, which growled along behind us in low gear, following us on our way to see something very frivolous, perhaps.

Inside the cinema, it was generally cold. We kept our coats on. My father and I sat at the front, in comfortable

chairs which had survived from Tsarina Alexandra's time. The bodyguard sat at the back of the hall. All watched the screen with equal attention.

There we saw all the best Soviet films, including some with a rather dull propagandist motivation. But what my father and I most enjoyed were the American films, which of course could not be shown to the people of Moscow. When they were too decadent, my father sent the bodyguard to wait outside; but he never sent me away.

My favourite films were musicals. My favourite singing stars were Betty Grable, Alice Faye and Judy Garland. Sitting there in the Kremlin, we saw *Strike up the Band*, *Springtime in the Rockies*, *Down Argentina Way* and other cheerful films. My father did not enjoy all the nudity, but nevertheless the music seemed to relax him.

I used to sing to my nurse, 'You'll find your life will begin. The very moment you're in—Argentina,' but she would wisely hush me. The words were poignant; I half-believed that my mother might be alive in another incarnation in Buenos Aires.

Despite this film-going, I grew to dread my father as I came to understand all he stood for. Yet I wept when finally he died of his stroke. Bulgagin, Voroshilov and Khrushchev were there at the last, and they all wept too. After all, they had truly loved him and believed in the common cause. When finally I left the dacha, and we climbed into the car, Bulganin put his arms round me and we wept together.

Somehow, somewhere, there may have been another world where it all turned out otherwise. Maybe we should just have seen things differently and it would really have been different.

XIV KILLING OFF THE BIG ANIMALS

THE OCEAN was shaped like a body, the Bay of Zubariski like a head. A narrow neck divided bay from sea, where a geological noose had been drawn tight about the throat. On the

rocky peninsular at that point, cascading down into the waters, stood the town-heap of Zubariski. Behind it sat the uncompromising shape of the Seventh Exploration Team's starship.

Towards sunset, the five members of the team surfaced almost in unison and climbed out of the darkening water to lie and gasp on the rocks. They pulled off their masks and snorkels, automatically looking back at the ocean.

'It's really great sport!' exclaimed Hamura Redon. 'Like nothing you ever met on Earth.' He wiped the sweat from his face and spat on to the rocks.

'I guess I killed twenty of the bastards,' said Nothing Chaundy, unzipping his plastic suit and laughing. 'Maybe twenty-four, twenty-five, who knows? You lose count...'

'Oh, why bother to count?' Nils Martenson said. 'There are millions of them in the oceans, just waiting to be exterminated, waiting to die, glad to die! Wow, that socko effect of *feeling* them die! It's incredible. This must be the greatest hunting place in the whole galaxy. Look out there—more coming!'

He pointed out to sea. Peculiar rock formations lent the Great Silarian Ocean a striped effect, where deep water alternated with ridges of rock, heavily fringed with crimson kelp, rising to just below the surface. The ocean was red here, not only with the reflection of the kelp, but with the blood of the slaughtered leviathans, some of the carcasses of which still threshed feebly near shore. Among them, new shapes moved.

'It's like the last few evenings,' Nothing Chaundy said. 'They're coming in to cart away their dead. Then the dumb goons will be back tomorrow to get themselves killed. They can't get enough of it.'

'Guess we can oblige them,' Joe Carnate said, and they all laughed.

They picked up their gear and trudged through the cancerous spikes of the town-heap, companionably chatting together as they made their way uphill between walls of pitted alleyways. The dark was coming on. They'd had a fantastic day's sport. An evening's drinking lay ahead. And

of course there were the girls, waiting for them, chained, in the ship.

'Just one fly in the ointment,' David Schmidt said. 'The Sector Adjudicator is due to arrive tomorrow. He's going to raise hell when he finds how we've been breaking Galactic Law, slaughtering an Inferior Species.'

'We can fix him.' Nothing Chaundy said, grimly.

The Sector Adjudicator arrived as expected. His slim vessel put down neatly a few metres away from the Exploration ship, and the Adjudicator himself emerged, when the dust had subsided, accompanied by two law-enforcement robots.

The Adjudicator was a young man, rather delicate to look at, with fair hair and stern grey eyes. His clothes were neat, his gestures likewise. Without hesitation, he marched towards the starship, where the five team-members were lounging, and introduced himself as Judge Jack Paramour. They eyed him with contempt, staring at his lips rather than his eyes as he spoke.

'I received a scatter to say that you have established contact with a sentient marine life-form here on Silaria. Is that correct?'

'Correct,' agreed Nothing Chaundy. 'And "established contact" just about sums it up. To put it bluntly, Judge, we been having the time of our lives shooting that aforesaid damned marine life-form to all hell and back, haven't we, boys?'

Laughingly, the others agreed.

'That is a contravention of Galactic Law and carries the extreme penalty, if you have been doing as you say.'

'What do you mean, if? Are you doubting our word, Judge?' Hamura Redon roared, in genial fashion. 'Let's take you down to the shore and show you! You'd accept two hundred carcasses as evidence, wouldn't you?'

Paramour drew himself up and said, 'Your attitude is one of extreme irresponsibility. It is my duty to warn you that my robots here are recording everything you say, and that the judiciary computer may use the recording in evidence. If you wait here, I will equip myself for a visit to these

marine creatures.' He nodded grimly, turned and walked back to his ship, the robots marching in step with him. Both robots had eyes in the back of their heads.

'To hell with him,' said Joe Carnate. 'Let's get our gear and go down to the juice. That soft little Earthman can join us if he feels like it.'

He said it loud enough for Paramour to hear.

Paramour did not turn. Entering his ship, he quickly stripped down and dressed himself in a frog-suit. If the marine life-form had developed some primitive kind of communication, as the scatter had suggested, then he hoped to be able to meet them in their own element. He had no need to make a preliminary report; the robots had it all on record.

'This team has entirely forgotten the Exploration Charter,' he observed to his attendants. 'Some force has been at work on them and we must find what it is. It could be dangerous—an airborne spore, for instance, which renders people reckless and uninhibited, and so easy prey to predators. They behave almost like drunks. Could be something water-borne, if they've been much in the water...'

He returned outside. The magnificent oblate sun floated over a range of hills, its edges ragged, its core streaked with orange furies. It shone on the starship. The team had gone.

Paramour started towards the ruinous pile of town-heap. Soon, he was among its winding alleys. The buildings were all of pebble, bound together with something that could have been mud or pulverised rock. It gave the place a leprous effect. He scratched at a wall and found it uncrumbling. There were doorways, but no doors. After only a moment's hesitation, he entered one of the buildings.

The room was irregularly formed. It might have been a cave. It contained no artefacts. At the back of the room was a slope with crudely formed and irregular steps cut in it. He climbed them cautiously, to find himself on the next floor. He called to the robots to stay below and guard.

This room was dark, lit only by a window no bigger than a hand. Paramour went to it and stared out. Through the shafts of other buildings he could see the distant glitter of

oceans. He moved to another room on the same level. That also was empty. The floors were uneven. There was a stale damp smell everywhere. He stood silently, his hand on one pitted wall, thinking, wondering. The empty spaces of universe came down and touched him.

He climbed up two more storeys. That was as high as he could go. Where there were windows, they were small and irregular; all looked towards the ocean. Paramour extended his senses, trying to comprehend what sort of life had filled the building, the town. All that came back to him was a faint sound of waves.

Something made him reluctant to leave.

Finally, he retraced his steps, emerging into the shadowed street. Without a word, he motioned to the robots to follow him. He walked down an incline, over irregularly placed stones. No weeds grew between stones, not a blade of grass. He came to the rocks.

Various items of undersea equipment lay scattered by the water's edge. He noticed spare oxy-helium cylinders, flippers, two magnificent harpoon guns, before he turned his attention to the waters.

To his right side was the sweep of the Bay of Zubariski. Although the water looked still, except where it lapped against the land, it was dark and uninviting. He observed that the sand which fringed it was black and of volcanic origin. To his left lay the expanse of ocean. He sent one of the robots down into the water to collect a sample and make an analysis. While that was happening, he stood with arms folded and eyes narrowed, looking about at the land, the coastline with its distant bays, the ocean, the orangey sky with its freight of cloud.

The robot read off its analysis. The ocean was the usual vat of salts, cast up from the early days of the planet, constantly replenished by the elements, constantly yielding itself.

A shape came rolling up the water, threshing with a clumsy arm. It rotated as it did so, and a spiral swathe of crimson poured from a breach in its vivid yellow body. Paramour looked down at it with interest, adopting a pro-

fessional stance which concealed both pity and distaste. An arm was flung from the ocean and struck rock. For a moment, it seemed as if the creature was going to heave itself from the water, and Paramour stared into a horizontal face—at least, there were two wide-spaced eyes, with lids that blinked and pupils that appeared to weep. Then the thing fell back into the water.

Another creature blundered to the surface beside it and died. This one had a harpoon right through one of its eyes.

'Photograph them,' Paramour ordered the robots. 'I'm going to stop those men. The entire Exploration Team must have gone mad. This situation is about to turn into a massacre, and I can't let it happen.'

His face went pale with rage. The act of summary execution lay within his powers as Adjudicator, and he was prepared to use it rather than stand by and see wild life so casually wiped out. He zipped up his suit, snapped down the face-plate, and prepared to enter the water. At the last moment, it occurred to him that he was about to face five irresponsible men; he turned and snatched a harpoon-gun from the rock, charging it as he kicked himself below the surface.

The water was murky with blood from dying animals. He switched on his beam. All about him were slowly threshing limbs. He realised that the current was bringing the maimed creatures in towards the neck of bay, and that the trigger-happy members of the exploration team were possibly some way out to sea.

The marine creatures had six legs, two pairs at one end of their pod-like bodies, one pair at the other. The legs were distinctly four-sided and covered with markings which might be scales. The underside of their bellies was a sombre green in contrast to the bright yellow of their backs. Large mouths were set in these bellies. The mouths were open as if in pain, but Paramour saw no teeth there. He did not believe that the creatures were or could be dangerous. They looked as helpless as babies.

As he dived under another great carcass, a human figure swam to meet him and clutched his arm.

'I order you to stop this insane killing,' Paramour shouted.

The other man pressed his face-plate to Paramour's and said, 'Glad you could join us. You investigated that town-heap? It's used by the land-going phase of these beasties. Isn't that crazy? But it's light-years more fun to slaughter them down here!'

He broke away and was gone from Paramour's grasp. Alone again, Paramour kicked out for deeper water.

The ocean floor fell away below in a startlingly steep descent. The water was clear of blood, so that Paramour switched off his beam. As he did so, a new sensation came over him.

He began wishing he could meet an unwounded creature face-to-face. He felt he could ... he felt he could put it right. In some way, these silly creatures had gone wrong. They had become too big and too clumsy. They were also—no doubt of that—too damned trusting. So damned trusting that you could not in part help realising that they deserved all they got.

These reflections were slightly feverish. Afterwards, Paramour could never recall how exactly he experienced them. He only knew that he was overwhelmed by a lust to sort these great innocent boobies out.

At which point, one of the creatures rose from somewhere below him, materialising out of the thick fathoms of green. He watched it coming, with only its rear legs kicking, its front pairs raised as if in some idiot form of greeting. Its body was rocking, so that he saw the eyes and the open mouth in turn, on either side of the pod-shaped body. It looked rather as if the creature was making a foolish grinning face at him. He blasted off with the harpoon-gun almost without realising what he did.

To his delight, the bolt caught the creature in the corner of its mouth. It went into immediate contortions of pain, crumpling up most satisfyingly, trying to wrap all its limbs round the point from which death was pouring into it. Paramour seemed almost to catch some of its agony, and sweet was the taste of it. He deliberately flipped through the curtains of its blood as he went in search of another target.

There were many more creatures around. They were

flocking in, almost as if asking to be killed. He longed to slay every one of them, to make them die lingering deaths, to suffer and sink and suppurate in blood. A great pair of eyes turned on him from the depths. This creature, he saw, was monstrous, the biggest yet, and had two small creatures at its side. By the gravities, it was a mother, suckling two infants as it went along. The demand to kill *her*, and to blow the infants apart, was irresistible. He loaded up, letting her see what he was doing—just in case, as he hoped, she was intelligent enough to understand his action. Then he blasted her between the eyes. The little ones clung to her twitching carcass until he shot them just as anticipated, limbs drifting slowly apart, curtains of guts disentangling.

The human figure was back again, pulling at his arm. They touched face-plates.

'You're doing good, Judge. There's masses more of the bastards out where we are. Come on!'

'I'm coming,' Paramour said. 'Did you see the way I blew those babies apart! Jesus, what terrific sport!'

Together, they kicked out for deeper water.

XV WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE YOU DOING IT?

WHILE Jack Paramour was enjoying a sporting holiday on the planet Silaria, he had a strange dream. It came and went, and was like no ordinary dream. When the gravo-neuronic rhythms of the body are disturbed by a strange planet, dreams are never ordinary, their architecture indicates a cellular awareness of planetary difference.

Jackson Paramour, Jack's father, had been a brilliantly successful costume-jewellery designer in his time. He had been single-minded in his profession, always working, always travelling—either to acquire exotic stones or to sell his creations, and had had little time for his wife and three sons. 'Let's face it,' the eldest son Roy once said to Jack,

'Father's as vulgar at heart as his gawds. He's got nothing to offer us but tinsel.'

Jackson Paramour, who drove himself too hard, died when the boys were young. It was a sunny day early in May, when the blossom was on the bough, and Paramour had cornered the zircon market. His sons were poured into suits and ties and taken to a dreadful mausoleum modelled on the Hajia Sofia in Istanbul (but five times bigger), where the tarted-up remains of Dad were ceremonially enclosed in a coffin of white marble. They went back home laughing to their private hot-cat track. Tea was served at 4.30 as usual.

The exploration starship 'Hamura Redon' had discovered a G-type sun with nine planets. Captain Nothing Gabitas checked with Shipmind.

'It is Sol, The Sun,' said Shipmind, when it had munched up spectrographic and other data.

'Hey, we've found The Sun, boys,' Gabitas said into his chair-mike. 'Pure accident. All this while, everyone thought it was over in Galaxy Six—just shows how wrong you can be.'

'Say, Cap, why don't we just tiptoe on past it and leave it among the lost?' Conroy said. 'I'm for heading for home and a change of women.'

Some agreed with Conroy, some disagreed.

'I think we ought to look in on it while we're in the vicinity,' Gabitas said. 'Considering people have been searching for it for centuries. Wasn't it supposed to have a couple of inhabited planets or something?'

'To hell with mythology, I'm with Conroy—let's get home,' said Pete Ulysses, who had a wife waiting for him, he hoped.

'Let's put it to the vote,' Gabitas said.

Three were for heading straight on and forgetting all about it. Four were for taking a quick look while they had the chance.

Gabitas spoke to Shipmind.

'Take us in,' he said. 'And start waking up our bodies, will you?'

Jack Paramour was a grown man now. He wore the insignia of his clan. He was walking through a museum with a friend when they came on the Books section. Looking idly about him as they strolled past the crowded shelves, he caught sight of his own name on a faded cloth spine and went closer.

YOU GET MORE BY BEING NICE. By Jackson Paramour.

'My father wrote that Book!' Jack said, and burst out laughing. 'Sorry, what were you saying about interplanetary subterfuge as applicable under the law of tort?'

They strolled on.

Later, he thought about the Book. The trajectory of his father's life had evidently not been the straight brutal rise from infancy to millionairessdom to coronary as hitherto believed. Somewhere, there had been other impulses in the man. Jack Paramour was not imaginative—at one time, he had been a passionate stamp-collector—but he suddenly realised that the costume-jewellery which was his father's trade might have begun as more than just an immensely profitable line; it might even have originated in a real creative spark. He decided he must acquire a copy of his father's book.

He advertised for 'You Get More For Being Nice'. Since money was no object, he soon had a copy in his hands. The leaves seemed to tremble as he opened it.

They were bellowing with laughter on the 'Hamura Redon'. The sun The Sun was close now; the crew were all back in their bodies, exercising and exhibiting them like new suits. But Shipmind was assuring them that the sun ahead had only eight attendant planets, and not nine.

'Then you've ballsed things up again, Shipmind, sorry,' said Gabitas. 'You say yourself there should be nine planets. You've got your readings all wrong.'

They loved it when they thought they had caught Shipmind in error, like children rebelling against parental stupidity.

'The readings all point to my initial assumptions being one hundred percent correct,' said Shipmind. 'Luminosity, composition, rotation, magnetics, ventality—all the figures

check out. The sun's The Sun OK. What's happened is that, over the ages, one of its planets has disappeared, or blown up, or gone chasing a tramp sun, or *something*. Funnier things have happened.'

'Let's go and have a shuftly, then,' Mark Polo said. 'Which planet is missing?'

'Third from The Sun,' said Shipmind.

'Third was always a tricky position,' Gabitas said.

Jackson Paramour's third son, Jack, closed 'You Get More By Being Nice' and put it down in front of him. He had enjoyed it. He found it a touching story. It told him much about his mother, whom he could not remember as well as his father. At least, the two main characters were Johnny and Sheila, and he assumed they were really his parents in literary disguise, since Johnny was a sculptor who had never made good because of his artistic integrity and Sheila was the most beautiful girl in the world. For the first time, Jack found himself wishing he had known his parents—'really known them', as he phrased it—before the world closed over their heads and their hopes.

Not a great deal happened in the novel. Most of it was set on Shrivdale Farm, an idyllic place practising old-fashioned dirt agriculture for the sake of tourists. Shrivdale was situated on the outskirts of Stringhove, Johnny and Sheila met and fell in love on the farm. Later, when Johnny, on the verge of suicide, unexpectedly inherited a fortune, he and Sheila bought the farm and lived very happily there. They reared lots of cows and three daughters.

Stringhove actually existed. Jack Paramour bought large-scale maps of the area. Sure enough, the name Shrivdale appeared there.

Jack resolved on a sentimental pilgrimage.

The crew had a ringside seat at one of the most amazing views in the universe. The 'Hamura Redon' sailed in orbit about The Sun's biggest planet, the fourth from primary; the ship had surrounded itself with a strong magnetic field as protection against the blasts of radiation coming from the planet.

At the present moment, the gas giant appeared in half-phase. Its great streaked face loomed beyond the ports, mantled with bands of grey, orange and salmon-pink. To the south of the planetary equator was a curiously enigmatic feature, an oblong expanse of an angry brick red hue some forty thousand kilometres long.

Shipmind was busy rattling off endless series of figures which flashed across the read-screens over the control panels.

So much chemical fury boiling away outside kept the men silent in awe. Finally, Gabitas said, 'It seems we have arrived just in time, according to Shipmind's reading. This planet, Sol IV, is mostly composed of hydrogen. The spectroscope tells us that the cloud-belts we're looking at consist of hydrogen, deuterium, helium, methane and ammonia. The planet's meteorology is internally-powered—it is radiating 3.9 times more heat than it receives from The Sun, and that figure is building up as is the emission of protons and high-energy electrons.'

'Then the sooner we get clear the better,' Pete Ulysses said. 'The implication is clear—this planet is unstable and is about to transform into a miniature sun.'

'“About to” is a relative term,' Gabitas said. 'Certainly a pseudonova condition is imminent, but that means, at the least, some ten thousand years ahead of relative stability.'

Shipmind said, 'A curious anomaly exists as regards the great red spot. In its centre is a circular dark patch, sometimes obscured. You see it?'

'I see it,' Gabitas said. 'I thought at first it was an optical illusion.'

'My readings show that the red spot itself is a column of heated gas blowing from the planetary interior. The black patch is comprised of solid matter, and exists at a much lower temperature. It would be possible for you, and not especially dangerous, to fly the ferry down and land on the black patch.'

'Now why in hell's name should we want to do a crazy thing like that?' Polo asked.

'Because my readings suggest that the black patch is our missing third planet, embedded in the face of the gas giant.'

Heavy rain had fallen the previous evening. This morning was misty and dull. The ground was waterlogged. Within five minutes of leaving his car, Jack Paramour was wading across boggy ground, with peaty water pouring into his shoes.

Nevertheless, this was Shrivdale Farm, or what was left of it. He had his large-scale map in his hand, and the precious copy of 'You Get More By Being Nice' in his raincoat pocket. Although he knew where he was, it was still difficult to orientate himself. The original drive way had gone, wiped out by a small packaging factory. He had approached obliquely, climbing through barbed wire, past a barking dog. What had been remote countryside in his father's day was now a glum stretch of non-country on the outskirts of Stringhove, with thistle-choked fields and polluted streams. No doubt the developers of Stringhove had already parcelled up the rest of the open land with their fat red grease pencils.

There were suburban homes all around, fenced, patched with pretty strips of garden, the odd tennis court, the odd swimming pool. Little girls sat on ponies. Lawn mowers purred. Milkmen chuntered from door to door in square vehicles.

All the same, the morning's fog did much to counteract this lapse into genteel mediocrity. It lent mystery and a vanishing perspective. Mist was indigenous here, like nothing else.

He squelched over to a rank copse, consisting mainly of beech and silver birch trees. He jumped a ditch, climbed more wire, and was among the trees. He saw a small hut ahead, very tumbledown. As he worked his way round to the front of it, he found that an old car had been driven into the hut for shelter. The wheels of the car had gone long ago, and its every window was broken. This was a miserable spot where journeys died for lack of destination.

Paramour coughed a little. The noise reminded him to light a cigarette. He smoked and thought, and listened to the solitude. Despite the muffling effect of the fog, he could hear traffic moving on two nearby roads. He had no sense

of escape, or of being back in the past, or of finding his roots, or indeed of any vaguely hoped-for discovery.

Only then did the make of car register on him. It was a Ford. He turned to the novel, pulling it from his raincoat pocket, ruffling carefully through its pages. Johnny had driven a Ford. At one crucial point in the story, Johnny had driven into the market town of Stringhove to meet Doreen and had chanced on her sister, Sheila, instead. That was when the romance between Johnny and Sheila began. Of course, it might not be the same car at all. The model was not specified!

And the shed. The trees had grown up round it since. He went out and looked more carefully at the ground. A track had once run this way, fringed with laurel hedge. Then he identified the shed; it was the apple store which featured in Chapter Six. He was standing here, alone, smoking his cigarette, at the very place where his parents had had that monumental quarrel and then made love. If the sketchily fictionalised account was to be trusted, it was on precisely this waterlogged spot that he had been conceived, long ago.

He leaned against the ancient wood of the doorpost, smoking his cigarette and trying to feel something profound. The noise of the traffic bothered him.

Five suited figures climbed from the ferry into a landscape that possessed the extreme beauty of ruination. Grey smoke and drifting orange mist enshrouded them, while the sky all round flickered with the poisons of the gas giant's atmosphere. Only a few miles to the north of them were clusters of raging volcanoes, where the third planet's core was boiling itself off, donating its petty furies to the birth of a new sun. But they trod relatively safe ground, protected from the furious heart of the giant by the planetary bulk on which they walked. That planet bobbed high in the gas giant's atmosphere, buoyed by geysers of semi-liquid gas under pressure.

Through their suit radios, Shipmind said casually, 'My readings suggest that the foreign body is sinking slowly towards the core of the gas-giant. It will ultimately trigger off a nova condition.'

'Like a snowball sinking into a pot of treacle,' Polo said.

There was little to be seen through the dense atmosphere. They straggled out over the uneven ground, instinctively looking for a focal point. In their helmets was the tremendous roar of static, which no rectification system could phase out. Underfoot, burnt out stumps of trees. Smoke still drifted from some of the stumps.

It was slow going over the treacle ground. Gabitas stumbled across a low charred thing. He fumbled at it, walked round it, shining his beam. His slow nightmare movements almost persuaded him he was underwater.

He had happened on a machine of some sort. Part of the metal had been molten, and was now cool again, its original shape bleared and distorted. He heaved at the whole thing, but it did not budge. He stooped, examining one end. There was an emblem of some sort, still reasonably intact because it lay against the ground. Activating the manual servo-mechanism, Gabitas wrenched at the emblem and got it free. It said: FORD. It must have meant something to someone. The third planet had probably been inhabited. He stuffed the artefact into a pocket of his suit and straightened up.

The orange mists seemed to be closing in. Overhead, there was flame in the sky.

'Better get back to the ferry,' he said. 'There's nothing here.'

A friendly asexual being was saying, with its arm round Jack Paramour's shoulders, something he could not understand.

'What did you say?'

It sounded like, 'Searching for roots may be necessary but remember that flowers do not blossom underground.' Paramour was confused and woke resentfully. He tried to struggle back to that mysterious conversation. It had fled.

Eventually he sat up and found himself refreshed. Climbing out of bed he yawned and went across to the window.

The sun shone outside. There lay Silaria, like a dream.

LONG TIME AGO, NOT FORGOTTEN

by

BOB VAN LAERHOVEN

Translated by

LES S. CORNWELL

Out in the galaxy among the multitudes of stars where the pure immutable laws of astronomical logic hold sway, out there in the cold depths, can there be a place for ordinary human emotions? Can love and regret and selfishness and self-sacrifice survive? Being human ourselves, we believe they can. But what if emotions exist between people who are not ordinary humans? Why should the inner life of a being who is not—quite—human be stifled because he finds difficulty in easy self-expression through the artful device of language? Would these people not have to find a special niche in society, and if, at the end, they found darker forces more powerful than they could realise, might they not act with sorrow and dignity made more profound by their very need for easy self-expression?

LONG TIME AGO, NOT FORGOTTEN

MY SHIP was not very big

But then I still needed room and you couldn't say circus
could afford top-class-ships, not even for a star with a tail
like me.

The bed was big enough.

The anti-g plates floated about fifteen inches above the
floor and they were strong. They had to carry my weight.

And Claire was beautiful too.

Strictly speaking she had an ordinary human body but
she was smooth all over.

I thought she was beautiful and that was enough.

I never asked her if I hurt her when we made love. It's a
pity I didn't but I don't think so, 'cause I was adapted by
human surgeons.

One thing is sure: I would have suffocated her at
standard gravity.

But control of gravity has its charms.

She always said the hard bristle, my tail was, tickled her.

And if you add all these things up, I still don't know why
she loved me.

Yet I believe she did.

That night she caressed my fur with her active hands and
I was sighing satisfied.

'All those tiny hairs and such an enormous moustache,'
she giggled and pulled my long yellow-brown whiskers.
'Later on I'll be itching everywhere.'

'Horrible!' I growled and swished jaunty with my tail.
'Say, things don't go bad here, do they. Still, a lousy planet.'

We looked through the window at a saffron coloured
sky. Gulju II (and what a lousy name for a lousy planet)

never had a real night. The sky varied from a clear orange to that dark saffron-like colour.

'Tell me, Gorath,' she said at last. 'What are you really doing in circus? What are you looking for?'

Normally circus-folks didn't ask such questions. Circus is a closed community where outcasts find equals. Our love for example wasn't discussed by our colleagues.

However, I didn't want to hide anything from her.

I sniffed thoughtfully.

'Circus is excitement,' I said. 'In a way: free. Always free.'

'You were not free before?'

'Reservations, you mean? No spirit. Not sure. Maybe I was. What brought you to circus?'

I thought that, after my answer, I too had the right to ask that.

A shadow darkened her face, or maybe it was just an expression, but before I could interpret, it vanished.

'Me? I devour emotions,' she said. 'You must take a look at the audience when one of us risks his life on stage. They all hope to witness a terrible accident. They're all sitting on the edge of their chair and consciously or not they hope to see some blood. But when that doesn't happen, they laugh and clap hands because all at once they feel well so that they can believe how nice and lovely they really are. You've got a lovely grin with those teeth, you know. Well, that's why I joined the circus. I'm alive!'

Her explanation didn't satisfy me but I left it as it was.

'I believe we're all kind of horrors.' I yawned.

'Everyone in this mad universe is a little balmy. The only difference between us and normal people is that we know it.'

'Philosophy is not my strongest side,' I sighed and turned on my back on the weightless sleeping-plates. I wished my vocal chords were better.

Then I could say more and nicer things.

She stroked the white thick fur on my chest.

'Roar again for me, Brutus,' she whispered.

The pneumo-tent was packed to capacity with natives of

Gulju II. According to me, they stank; but business is business said our manager and he wasn't averse to anything.

The robo-band played a few tunes which, through cunningly planned energy-paths in the seats of the audience, excited them.

I pushed my nose through the curtains. I didn't like that crowd.

Their smell was too refined for me, too sly.

But who, except a circus, wanted someone like me?

The robo-band did its best to burst a dozen eardrums when Breakbones came in.

A giant is big, but Breakbones is bigger.

He was a mutie from Cargenas V. He wasn't really a human being.

He looked like one but he had more arms and four legs under his knees.

He broke a few duranium bars just to warm himself up and juggled a while with gravity-discs. He threw them high up and just caught them again. But when they reached their highest point their weight was automatically doubled. And the clap they made when they hit his hands could be heard from more than a mile. To convince the audience he just let one of the discs drop and it drilled itself about five inches in the ground. That was rather sensational.

After that a strange apparatus was rolled into the ring. It was a platform with an enormous hammer on it. The handle of the hammer was flexible and was pulled backwards. It was held in its place by a strong power-field. The head of the sledge was a massive cube of duranium.

Breakbones went and stood in a white circle at a short distance from the apparatus while the manager explained the rules of the game. It always was as still as a mouse, then. If the handle of the hammer suddenly was let loose, the head would swish forwards with tremendous speed. Breakbones stood precisely on the spot where the head would drop. The audience was able to deactivate the power-field. Every button on the side of their seats, pushed in, meant an abatement of the field. The more buttons pressed at the right signal, the more power would be behind the forward movement of the hammer.

Breakbones was ready. His hands were spread. His legs were looking for the best position. Drums were beaten violently. A few times the chest of the artist went up and down fiercely. It seemed impossible that even someone like him could retain that falling violence.

Then the bell rang. The timing of the audience always was good. The head of the hammer jumped forwards nearly faster than the eye could follow and hit flesh with a sickening slap.

Breakbones staggered but quickly recovered. The head of the hammer rested in his hands like a formless and gigantic child.

Thus, the spectators weren't rewarded for their trouble.

After that he raised a spherical creature from Indura on a trailer. The monster wasn't very big but extremely heavy. In the lighter gravity of Gulju II, and most planets we visited, it had to be carefully kept alive with special medicines; but that the audience didn't know.

It roared very well and that was important. Of course, Breakbones could have taken a mechanical weight, but an animal was better.

The spectators always appreciated the victory of a human—or in this case a humanoid—over an animal.

Conducted by the false music of our robo's and smashing hand-clapping Breakbones left the ring proud and happy.

One day his muscles will lose their strength and even if Breakbones still lives a hundred years thereafter, he never will be someone anymore.

The audience is all he has.

And then it was Thoruf's turn, the black magician. The success of old Thoruf varied while Breakbones always had applause. But the man did his best.

The tent became a black universe when all the lights went out. A few half apprehensive shrieks were heard. It always was like that.

An echoing clap—the hi-fi crackled badly—and a few red spotlights in a star shaped figure were lit.

Slowly Thoruf became visible. His long beard and glittering eyes did well this time. I heard the reactions of the

spectators and smiled. Thoruf made a crafty use of reflection-effects to make sparkling discs of his eyes.

But he was a teleporter too.

He projected a snake from nowhere into the red bubble. It was poisonous.

It became nervous by the applause of the audience and its head flew forwards like the tongue of a 'lectrowhip.

The public shouted dutifully but the snout of the serpent never reached Thoruf. It was gone. OOOOHHH! they all cried.

This troop appreciated 'magic'.

Then several silver dishes descended while more and more red light came into the tent.

The dishes landed softly in the sand of the arena and on each of them a grinning demon-head appeared. It always took a few exacting hours of our make-up man to knead the tough syntho-tissue to the right shape.

The hidden loudspeakers in their big skulls whispered their infamous words and Thoruf stared at them.

He didn't have to let them disappear yet. He raised his arms, well timed, and pronounced an incantation for the sake of good order.

A chemical reaction in the heads made them inflame right on time.

Slowly and flaming, Thoruf teleported them upwards, and that was very imposing.

After that he dived from quite a height and vanished a second before he would have been smashed to death, and became visible again on an empty seat in the middle of the audience. His coat made a nice effect when he fell like that.

He retired while the spectators applauded.

After that Afna came, the firegirl.

My paws always were ready for her because she was rather helpless. Her flames didn't burn. On her homeplanet they served only for decoration. She could make all figures and many colours with them. Afna was not completely human, but she looked like one. Many things with a big brain—they're not always intelligent—look like human beings.

I didn't.

Her appearance always was quite successful 'cause humans are possessed by fire. I don't know why, I only know I don't like fire myself.

Every time, the show exhausted her; but she was happy when she could faint behind the curtains. The audience was hers for one moment and that's a lot for someone who never really had anything.

Then I laid my paw on her and her strength came back.

After that it was Claire's turn and of course I loved her.

But I didn't understand her act.

She walked in a balloon of golden light to the middle of the ring and the buzzers of the robos heightened their intensity.

There she stood motionless for about a quarter of an hour while the crowd yelled, applauded, jumped up, sat down, laughed and gasped for breath.

I didn't understand 'cause in my eyes she was only Claire and she stayed Claire who stood upright for a quarter of an hour.

But I didn't want to be curious anymore.

I thought she did something with human minds, something different from what I did myself. Her act was good enough according to the reactions of the public, and that was that.

She smiled at me every time she came behind the curtains, accompanied by a medley of applause and music.

Then she kissed me on my forehead, and pulled my lower lip down playfully.

'Well, eat 'em, Brutus,' she said and I heard her giggle when I strolled easily into the arena.

The instructions were bawled around by the microphones. The onlookers were asked to get up. They couldn't. With my mind I pushed them back in their seats and I smiled deeply with their astonished gasping and shrieking. Then I pulled one or two of them off their seats and made them do a few harmless things. They walked ten paces forward and then ten back again, they whirled with their arms, laughed, cried, roared and jumped around like fools. The audience laughed. They love clowns and especially unprepared and forced ones.

The monster Breakbones had picked up a few moments ago was brought back again and was irritated with a few violent 'lectroshocks.

It came rushing up to me and the audience yelled nearly in panic.

I hit the beast's nearly empty brain with my mind when it was at a distance of less than five metres and it stopped as if it had crashed against an enormous wall.

It howled to the invisible moon and the spectators held their breath. It was a ghostly, lamenting, accusatory sound of another world, of another kind of life and it usually moved them deeply. I felt sympathy—maybe respect—for that animal that couldn't think. It reminded me of my own youth and of something else too, something dark. I always was ashamed that an intelligent animal like me had to treat a fellow that way, but the audience liked it.

After that I conjured some rubbish in their brains and jumped, as a variation of Thoruf, from a great height to the ground. The spectators were sure I would vanish like the magician but that didn't happen. At about five metres above the ground, just when people began to shriek, I wanted my weight to be that of a feather. The strange powers humans call 'gravity' understood me and I floated lightly above the sand.

Conducted by OOH! and AAH! and loud sighings I descended slowly.

That was it.

I pulled my lips back, showed my teeth and shook my head. Then I strolled out of the ring.

Claire laughed at me that evening.

'You kept it brief tonight,' she said. 'Didn't you like it?'

'Lousy crowd,' I answered. 'Smelled like death. Leeches pricked my mind. Wanted to see purple, red and THIS.'

I showed her one of my claws and quickly she tickled the brushes under it.

Those moments I wished I could laugh; but my vocal chords weren't good enough.

'They want to see and go through everything,' she said, calmly. 'Come on, let's forget it. We'll go and eat something. It's been enough for today. Say, are you really going

to devour ten pounds of meat AGAIN? You'll become a fat and lazy lion, you know.'

'Hmfff,' I sneezed. 'My stomach is bigger than yours, baby.'

The night brought us lightning.

And the lightning was inside my head.

There was a flash of a dark etching against the yellow brown sky of Gulju II.

Black natives with pointed things on their heads and long clothes.

And the naut which charges hit me and kept hitting me.

After that came the big muzzle of emptiness.

And later on, waking up.

I shook my head and bit inside at the pain upon it.

It disappeared slowly and I howled.

The place next to me was empty.

I sniffed and recognised her scent, together with the rancid fragrance of the folks of Gulju II.

The track was clear and my rage big.

I followed it through the steppe-like environs and I remembered vaguely the reservation like a bio-film hidden inside me.

I left the grey pointed city behind. The trace led me to a few soft round hills in the East.

The silver moon of Gulju II was rising and the ale-coloured light with the black edges improved my sight.

I found them in the shrubs at the foot of the highest hill.

The moon stood right above a statue. It had to be a statue because it didn't move, neither did it smell.

The natives grouped around it and I spotted Claire in their middle.

My whiskers trembled and my body entreated me to use my claws but my created mind forbade me.

There was something strange in the air, something wrong.

Claire didn't seem afraid and yet this had to be some sacrifice. The cloaks, the grotesque pointed hats, the monotonous singing that tormented my ears...

I pushed my soft belly in the sand and strained my muscles.

Then I jumped in their middle and they drew their nauts. Claire shouted but I didn't pay any attention to it and before they could use their weapons I stupefied them with my mind.

They stood still and I knew they wouldn't move until I permitted them to.

'Don't do it, Gorath, DON'T DO IT,' Claire softly said at once and then I fixed a part of my mind at her.

'What do you mean?'

'To keep up,' she answered, 'please, don't keep it up. Do you remember last night when you asked me why I joined the circus?'

'Yes.'

'I didn't tell you the truth. I'm not human, Gorath. I don't even look like one.'

'You've got a human body.'

'Because you want me to. That strong, proud mind of yours, Gorath ... You were thinking of a human body because you have a human mind. When I met you, I became one. That powerful mind of yours FORCED me into this shape. The other circus people see me as something else, something THEY want to see, but I asked them not to tell you. They didn't because they knew I love you, Gorath.'

'Come with me, then.'

'No ... You always wondered what I really did during my act ... Yes, I know that. You were curious but you didn't ask me because you respected the unwritten law of the circus. I haven't got a real shape, Gorath. For the audience I was what they wanted to see, everything and at the same time.'

'You have shape for ME,' I snarled, frightened.

'Your mind.' She smiled with silverblack trembling lips.

'Your strong, magnificent mind always tied me up in this shape, every time you saw me. Sometimes you even forced me in this shape when you couldn't see me but were thinking of me. That was a strange experience for me, Gorath, and you were thinking a lot of me. I love the shape you

gave me with your human mind, Gorath, like I love you and the power you have inside.'

'Come with me, then,' I said again; but I felt it was useless.

'I can't, Gorath,' she answered. 'Look at that statue. They are my race. In the past we were dispersed over several planets for reasons you would never understand. We've been looking for each other to embrace our final shape as a group. When we're alone we're shapeless; but with the group it's different. This statue nearly is our final shape and I'm the only one who's missing. My race traced my special aura on this planet and sent these natives who worship them as a god. Do you NOW understand why I came to circus? Strange organisms don't attract attention there and I had the chance to search the planets. Humans or humanoids usually are very severe with non-humanoids, except in circus.'

'For me you HAVE shape,' I said, obstinately.

'You still don't understand, Gorath, you don't WANT TO. I'm the missing link for the completion of the shape. We don't have a shape of ourselves because we're links in a greater whole, but now we're able to live our own life. I must go ... darling ...'

I looked at the statue. It wasn't human, neither a shape I knew, but it was beautiful to look at.

And incomplete, I could feel in one way. It seemed like a kind of ... question ...

'I'd like to stay with you,' she said and she laid her hand upon my head, 'because you, Gorath, have the essential of life: you love. But my race has been waiting for a long, long time and I can't take their life. You understand that, big, strong darling, don't you?'

I stared at the statue that would take so much away from me. At once I felt I was only an animal. An animal with a mind and unhappy. When I saw Claire the first time, I could have given her the shape of a lioness, but my mind ...

'Circus lonely place to live,' I said laboriously, 'all fools, horrors and outcasts. What am I going to do? Why me? Tired of planets, tired of myself. Be lonely. Why do you have human body? Damned mind. Why love for you?'

'Because you can give everything, Gorath,' her silver-black lips whispered.

'Help me to do the same.'

I showed my teeth. A sudden burst of rage hit me and the natives in my mental grip trembled and groaned.

'I'm only beast,' I growled. 'In spite of mind, only beast. I'll never gain love of human being. You've been playing with me.'

A tear rolled over her nearly-golden cheeks like a fluid pearl and my rage decreased. She didn't answer and a spear of pain hit me between my paws through my heart.

I didn't want to persevere. It would hurt her more than me.

Her race was lost without her and so was I.

But I was a king. I could and had to bear. And she would soon forget, would be picked up in a greater whole and forget.

I bowed my head and she kneeled for me and kissed my snout.

I felt I wasn't made for human love and yet I desired it.

The humans have done something strange with me. They should 've left me alone in the reservations where I was a real king, because I didn't know ...

Now, I'm just a big lion who can play games with others with his mind and who can talk more or less. A genetic experiment that ended otherwise.

A clown. An attraction. A freak.

And yet I could bear it.

'Roar one more time for me, Brutus,' she said softly and tenderly.

She was crying and the words seemed wrong.

She stroked my moustache and I wished I could cry too. I couldn't.

I looked at the silver moon and hung my head downwards to the ground.

I roared and the sound reverberated against the sand, undulated over the hills and lost itself in a wall of stars ...

Now I'm in a laboratory.

I'm waiting.
I pay them well to take that human mind away from me
again.
I loved circus.
I love Claire.

ZONE

by

PETER LINNETT

After the jolly undertakings of his 'And When I Die' in New Writings in SF 24, Peter Linnett here turns to a subject of equal horror; but he treats this story in an entirely different fashion. This must appear as one answer to the problem presented by Vera Johnson in 'The day they cut off the power', an answer, one suspects, that would be welcomed with great ardour in various quarters. The two stories present two different solutions, their yin and yang, however, pointing out with terrifying clarity that there yet remain other solutions ...

ZONE

STENMAN had insisted on driving him along the stretch of country that lay between his sector offices and the city. 'I'm responsible for everyone going into Farnaran,' he had said, ignoring Prentiss's plea that he could make his own way.

Now they were five minutes from the outskirts, and Prentiss found his heart beating faster. He still remembered the odd news reports about Farnaran from some years back. In his capacity as a freelance science writer he had been invited to spend two weeks lecturing in psychology at Farnaran's university. After that he would move on.

Stenman scratched his beard. 'I realise you wanted to come by yourself, Mr. Prentiss. Since the sectors were instigated we've all become a little suspicious of one another. It's the mood of the times.' He looks like a cowboy, thought Prentiss—brown and muscled, nothing like a sector administrator.

They were passing an autodump. Prentiss gazed silently at this ironic monument to technology; his own country did not yet have to contend with them. 'That doesn't mean we have to like it.'

'We're almost at the city now.'

The sprinkling of houses and shops outside the city limits were deserted. Prentiss had half-expected to see barbed wire, but there was nothing menacing here. They pulled up outside a barrier with a small office alongside. A man wearing a quasi-military uniform emerged and began to approach the car.

Stenman turned to Prentiss. 'Give this guy the card I gave you and you're through. OK?'

'Thanks for your help, Mr. Stenman.' He grabbed his bags and got out. Stenman lifted his hand in farewell, did a U-

turn and drove off. Prentiss found himself facing the man in uniform.

'Your authorisation, please.'

He fumbled in his pockets for the yellow card and pushed it towards the official. It seemed to satisfy him; he raised the barrier and handed the card back. Prentiss walked through.

Farnaran was a grey, dull city, and there was a drab, functional feel about its buildings. Nevertheless Prentiss felt an uneasy, steely atmosphere in the air. First, though, he had to get to the university. A passer-by gave him directions; it was only some two hundred yards away.

The university's several buildings looked like a set of office blocks. He crossed a wide square, surrounded by the buildings, where students were milling. Sliding doors opened at his approach; he went to the reception desk and asked for Professor Sarris, who had invited him. He was lecturing, and someone was brought to take him to wait in Sarris's office. They went up three floors in a lift and along a corridor before reaching Sarris's small, book-filled office. It faced out on to the square.

He dropped his bags on the floor and waited. Five minutes later the door opened. Before him was a man he took to be Sarris—he had never met him, but they had carried on an intermittent correspondence. Much taller than Prentiss, he had cropped black hair and narrow eyes, was wearing a sweater and jeans.

'Greg Prentiss?' Smiling, he extended his hand. 'They told me you were here—it's marvellous to see you. Excuse the outfit, I joined in on a basketball game this morning, haven't had time to change.'

'It's marvellous to be here, Charles.' Sarris was coming across as ebullient as on paper.

'Look, first I'll take you to your apartment—right next door to the Uni, in fact. Then you'll want to be shown around. Luckily I've the rest of the day free.'

The apartment was large and comfortable; Prentiss deposited his bags there. They had lunch and then, beginning with the university, Sarris took him on a Cook's tour of the

city which left Prentiss considerably depressed. There was nothing in Farnaran worth seeing. Later they stopped to rest in a park (the only one in the city), and Prentiss casually mentioned the reports from the city he had read some years ago.

Sarris suddenly sat up. 'You mean the Red Zone. I'm surprised you mention it. My God, I wish I was there instead of here!'

'Why, for heaven's sake?'

'It's said to be a paradise! Don't you know the story? Six, seven years ago now, a group of young people saw that this sector of city land was unused, and got permission to take it over ... It's all so vague, the Zone has become almost mythical. It's—well, an alternative society, without our pressures or worries.'

'But how do they live? What do they do?'

'They grow crops. They don't live in a concrete city, Greg. They live off the earth, off nature—several hundred of them. Very occasionally I think they let someone else through. Officials and journalists have visited the place and come back unbelievably enthusiastic. Greg, they've bridged the gap between man and animal. The alternative society works!'

Sarris's naïve enthusiasm seemed to be genuine; Prentiss wanted to know more, but Sarris seemed unprepared to tell him much. 'Is there any chance of seeing it, Charles? I'd be most interested and grateful if you could arrange it.'

'I've no authority, Greg—believe me, if I could get through, I'd have done so by now. It's a few miles in a westerly direction—I can't tell you much more than that, details are closely guarded. We can't have things upended by people always taking off to the Zone. Most of us have succeeded in pushing it to the back of our minds by now. There was publicity a few years ago, but not now. But by all means walk around; I guess there's no harm in that ...'

Next morning—a Saturday—Prentiss did just that. He strolled vaguely around the city for most of the day. After reading the reports whose contents Sarris had brought back to him he had not thought of Farnaran at all, even after

beginning the correspondence with Sarris. Now he found his interest aroused; he would begin to do a little detective work...

He got no farther than the commercial landscape that composed most of Farnaran. In the evening he returned to his apartment and slept until late next morning.

He was surprised to find his students highly responsive and imaginative, and his lectures on Maslow and Fromm went over well. At the end of one lecture he mentioned the Zone and a hubbub began. Everyone was talking at once.

'I wish we could go there.'

'That's something I'll bet you don't have back home, Sir...'

'One day we'll *all* be able to live there.'

And so the Zone came to dominate his thoughts again. One day, after his last lecture, he set out in the direction Sarris had mentioned.

Once again all he could see were office blocks. These gradually gave way to a residential district. Prentiss noticed a helicopter flying over the city. He passed one or two factories and began to feel disorientated, but kept walking. After forty-five minutes he stumbled on to a cleared area. He heard the sound of the helicopter, and began to walk more quickly. A huge wall loomed in the distance, and he headed for it. Like that of a factory, it seemed to stretch farther than he could see. It had no doors. Struggling to assimilate it, he decided to head back, and retraced his steps until he came once again to a residential district.

The helicopter had disappeared.

His next attempt came later that week. Occasionally he went to Sarris's bachelor apartment in the evenings, and chose a night when he had nothing planned.

The night was cold; there was no one about. He pulled his jacket closer to him. In the dark he was unsure of which direction in which to head, but kept moving, not having the courage to stop. His footsteps echoed around him. After continuing for half an hour in the eerie gloom he slowed,

and his heart began pounding as he saw the wall ahead of him.

A hundred yards away a car zoomed past. Prentiss huddled in a corner, looked to left and right. It was too dark for him to see anyone, but neither could they see him. Without stopping to think he walked across the road and began to move down along the wall. Touching it, he found it to be thin, almost tinny. It made a hollow noise when he knocked on it. He could not see an entrance. One hundred yards further on he came to what appeared to be an abandoned building. The wall turned at an angle, coincided with the side of the building and appeared to run on ... he could go no further.

There was a sound from inside the building, followed by heavy footsteps. Prentiss tried to edge in to the small space between the branching wall and the building.

The man came closer, suddenly turned to where Prentiss was standing. 'You,' he said.

Prentiss had no choice; he stepped out. Before him was a policeman wearing a crash helmet, tight black trousers and jacket. 'Are you a visitor?' he asked.

'Yes, I'm—'

'You're unfamiliar with our ways, and you were just resting. You'd lost your way.' All this in a low monotone.

'That's right—'

The policeman held up a hand. 'I think you'd better come and explain yourself at HQ. Come on.' He turned, confident that Prentiss would follow.

Something clicked inside Prentiss's mind. He lifted a foot and pushed as hard as he could. The policeman toppled to the ground. Prentiss ran back the way he had come; he did not hear the policeman following. Then something flicked past his shoulder and vanished—the bastard was going to try to floor him. Head down, he crossed the road, past houses and shops. Behind him the small pellets were hitting the ground; now he could hear the policeman running. The sound of his boots clicking against the pavement echoed down the street.

Prentiss turned into an alleyway and kept running, coming out on a street on the other side. Ten minutes later he

saw the university ahead of him, its square lit up. He stopped and looked behind him. No one was there—the policeman must have given up.

Back at his apartment he discovered that one of the policeman's pellets had torn through his trouser leg, missing his thigh by a fraction of an inch.

The first person he saw at the university next morning was Sarris, who looked worried. 'Could we talk in my office?' he asked. 'It's important, Greg.'

Sarris said nothing as they pushed through the students crowding the corridors to the lift. When they were safely inside the office he began immediately: 'Greg, there's been a report that someone was behaving suspiciously near the Zone last night. Apparently a policeman followed him but gave up when he realised how few visitors there are here—all can be brought together quite easily. After all, only a visitor would be snooping round the Zone.'

Prentiss kept a straight face. 'And?'

'Well, you and a few others will be asked to come to police HQ so that this chap can identify whoever it was. I've been asked to tell you this as I'm responsible for your safety. Greg—you don't mind if I ask, do you—was it you? Please don't think...'

'No, Charles, it wasn't me; I wouldn't be that stupid. What'll happen to the person concerned?'

'He'll be asked to leave and his superiors, if any, will be informed of his actions. Things may be made rather tough for him. It's just a matter of going along to prove you aren't their man. You should receive a communication from HQ today, and they'll send someone to pick you up. In plain clothes, of course.' He glanced at his watch. 'Time to begin lecture numero uno, eh?'

They both headed for the door. Prentiss said, 'I don't like it, Charles. Why keep a policeman at the Zone, and what could a visitor—'

Sarris cut him short. 'Don't ask me, Greg. I don't make the rules.'

The summons was handed to him in a plain brown en-

velope as he came out of the morning's last lecture. It read: 'You are required for an identification session at Farnaran Police Headquarters. The reason will have been explained to you. A white car will be waiting for you'... the words *outside the University at 3.30 p.m.* had been inked in on the printed card... 'Please give this card to the driver.'

There was only one thing to do now.

At 12.30 he walked across the university square and out into the street. He went to his apartment, packed his bags and retrieved the yellow card which he hoped would get him through the barrier. Then he made his way down to the street.

Luckily he remembered the way he had to go. Nervously fingering the revolver in his coat pocket he headed for the checkpoint. Already he could feel his stomach shrinking to an uncomfortable knot.

Once he panicked and involuntarily began to run, but quickly checked himself. The streets were crowded—it was the lunch hour—and he tried not to let his unease show in his face. When at last he reached the checkpoint he saw a uniformed man—not the one he had met previously—standing by a white car parked next to the office adjoining the barrier. *Now or never.* He walked over and produced his card.

'What do you want?' the man asked.

'I'm leaving. Open the barrier, please.'

'We had no word. The sector's sent no car. Who are you?'

'I'm a visitor, and—'

'Mister, I can't let you through—you should know that. I'd better get someone to take you to HQ.'

Prentiss cursed under his breath. He knew he had no choice.

The man went into his office and spoke to someone on the phone. Then he came and stood by Prentiss until five minutes later a police car pulled up. He opened the passenger door and Prentiss got in. They drove back through the city's main thoroughfare; the policeman driving said nothing until he stopped outside a tall grey building. 'Right. We're here.' Prentiss followed the policeman, who had

grasped him by the elbow, into this vast building. They went up in a lift and along a series of corridors to an empty room. He was told to wait there, and the door was closed.

The room was bare apart from two wooden chairs—suspiciously like an interrogation chamber, Prentiss thought. Before long a short man in a white shirt and grey trousers came in and sat opposite Prentiss. 'Your name, please.'

He gave it.

'Oh? Aren't you needed for an ID parade this afternoon? Why this sudden desire to leave our beautiful city?' His voice had suddenly hardened.

'I wanted to leave. Do I need to say more?'

'Here you do, Mr. Prentiss. You didn't get in easily, did you? Did you expect to click your fingers and get out just like that?'

Prentiss said nothing.

'You've been behaving very suspiciously. And you're interested in our paradise behind the wall, I believe—someone is. Their society may work better than ours, but nevertheless we want to keep ours going ... you follow?'

'I think so. Believe me, my interest isn't malevolent.'

'So it was you who ran from our man last night.'

Prentiss bit his lip. 'Yes.'

The man stood up. 'O.K., Mr. Prentiss, we won't keep you very long.'

He went out, leaving the door open. Evidently they were well inside the building.

Obviously—visitor or not—he would be charged with resisting, if not arrest, then something like it. He stood up and went to the door; the corridor was empty. He picked up his bags, took another quick look—there were stairs at the far end. He ran along the corridor and began leaping down three stairs at a time. They had come up higher than he thought, and the flights seemed endless. He passed two men in suits who glanced at him but made no move to stop him. By the time he passed through the main doors and out into the street he felt winded.

He headed west, with the revolver still in his pocket.

The time he took to get to the Zone felt shorter than it must actually have been. Before long he saw the wall. Coming to the turning, where the wall met the building, he saw a door and looked through the section of glass set into it. Nothing. He tried the handle: the door was locked. He took the revolver from his pocket and smashed in the glass; it was not too difficult to reach and unlatch the lock.

The door opened, and he found himself in a large, semi-dark room. Before he could move he heard scuffling several yards away. 'You Sergeant Cooke?' someone called.

Prentiss hesitated. 'Yes.'

'You'll pay for that glass. Now come and give us a hand with these two, they're bloody difficult.'

He gripped his revolver and moved forward. Just then the door opened a few inches more, throwing a lance of light across his body.

'You're not Cooke!'

There were four men, two policemen handcuffed to two other men. The policemen squinted in the half-light for a moment. One of the handcuffed men whirled and smashed his fist into his captor's face, then his stomach. The policeman collapsed, bringing his captive with him. The other policeman hesitated, and his captive leapt, drew his arm across the man's neck and squeezed. Prentiss ran forward and brought his revolver down on the policeman's skull. Both he and his captive collapsed. The others were struggling; Prentiss braced himself and repeated the act.

One of the captives said: 'God! Who are you?'

'Let's just say I'm an inquisitive type ... Is this the Red Zone?'

'We had a militant group at the University,' the other said. Both were young, plainly-dressed, conventional looking. 'Sentence: an indefinite spell in the Red Zone. Let's get these handcuffs off.' Prentiss bent and fumbled for the keys in the policemen's pockets, and unlocked the cuffs.

'Now we'll chain *them* up.' During this the two men remained silent. Prentiss said, 'Can we get into the Zone? I was told it was a—'

'—paradise? So were we, man, so were we. The bastards. Are you a visitor?'

'Later. Look, can we get through?'

'They were about to take us through that corridor over there'—he pointed to it—'when you came in. But first...' He bent and picked out the walkie-talkies the policemen had tucked into their belts, and placed them in his pockets. 'We don't want them calling their buddies when they wake.'

'Let's go.' They moved off down the narrow corridor. Two minutes later they came to a dead-end; a large man-hole was set into the concrete floor. The three of them pulled at it; nothing happened. Then Prentiss found it had to be unscrewed, like a bottle-top. When they had removed the heavy object they saw stairs leading down into darkness, and descended cautiously. At the bottom they fumbled in the darkness until they reached another set of stairs, which led upwards. There was light further up.

They came out on to some kind of large compound, and stood blinking in the half-light for several seconds. Then they saw the people. There were hundreds of them, haggard and thin, standing about in groups. In the distance were walls rising to unscalable heights. Several large huts were situated about one hundred yards away. For a moment time seemed suspended; no one moved. At last some of the people noticed them, and began murmuring among themselves.

'They'll think we're police,' said one of the men. 'You're free!' he yelled. 'You're free, you can come through! You're free!' Prentiss gasped and wanted to vomit as the smell of the place hit him.

The people had formed a block and were beginning to approach them. Their clothes hung loosely on their bodies and some had hair down to their waists. As they came closer Prentiss noticed the way some of their mouths hung open, the pleading look in their eyes. Most of them were young, and looked half-starved.

Nevertheless, as it neared them the crowd gathered momentum; it seemed to be moving as a single mind. Prentiss saw that it would be impossible to stop.

The figures in the first row suddenly broke into a run, and the rest followed. Prentiss and the two men had to scatter

or they would have been trampled. Something hit Prentiss hard in the stomach; he fell to the ground, and for the next five minutes saw through misty eyes a steady stream of legs moving past without a break. When he was able to get up the compound was empty save for a few isolated figures who lay groaning on the ground. Scraps of clothing were scattered around. The wind blew dust across the compound.

Then it began to rain, and he saw a helicopter flying low towards the compound. It was time to leave. As he made his way down through the exit, he heard the thud of parcels hitting the bare earth.

HEATWAVE

by

DAVID LANGFORD

The statement that a computer is only as smart as the people who design, program and operate it, although it is quicker, has become a truism in most people's minds. That the academic and bureaucratic way of life tends to stifle creativity is a belief that may not be so easily recognised. Faced with facts and various lurid phenomena that lead to a conclusion the human mind cannot tolerate, the mind will seek alternatives, become deranged, will resolutely refuse to see. The only sensible thing left to do, of course, as the flames roar higher, is to laugh.

HEATWAVE

*Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress*

—Auden

CRYPTANALYSIS—I

SECRET

From : Ferris, Undersecretary, Intelligence

To : Stone, Head, Cryptanalysis

Dear Mr. Stone,

The Head of Intelligence presents his compliments and wishes to call your attention to the enclosed communication, recently received from the Lunar Observatory under somewhat suspicious circumstances. There has been no detectable response to further attempts at contact. Please return your comments, in triplicate, as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely

(Squiggle)

pp J. T. Ferris, Undersecretary.

Sweating in the intolerable heat of his office, Stone gave the letter a sulphurous glare. Just what was all this about? Intelligence passing the buck again? Angrily he twisted the air-conditioner knob. It was already fully on. Hell! For the first time, Stone glanced at the scrap of rice-paper (memorise and eat?) attached to the offending letter. It said, simply, THE SUN IS GOING NOVA.

INTERIM—I

The head of Intelligence sipped iced tea and contacted the CRETIN computaplex from a distant teletype. He began to type—?does complete security exist in cryptanalysis dept

YES

?how do you know

ASSUME COMPLETE SECURITY NONEXISTENT

COMPLETENESS IMPLIES TOTAL DEGREE OF EXISTENCE

ERGO SECURITY HAS INCOMPATIBLE QUALITIES COMPLETENESS

+ NONEXISTENCE///PARADOX///

ERGO COMPLETE SECURITY EXISTS

thankyou and goodbye

MYPLEASURE

GOODBYE, the computer signed off affably

Baffled but reassured, he left the terminal.

DEEPS—I

Twenty miles beneath the Earth's surface, down the deepest hole ever made by man, Charles Trente sweated and stared dully at the seismographs. *He* wasn't needed in that cave of machines—every last gadget was automatic, except the emergency shutdown switch. Rather than risk the expensive equipment to the smallest degree, the Powers Above—twenty long miles above—had decreed that a watchman must always be present.

Two weeks to go. His only pastimes were reading and writing. Mainly writing, for he hoped to sell his underground journal to some overground newspaper. He was working on it now.

Above, there is the abstract pattern of society—Maya—the woven mesh of trivial human interaction: below there pulses the naked reality. Good Sunday-supplement stuff this. *Chthon: the aching weight of a million million tons of rock. Sounds good, must check the figures. Chthon: grinding darkness shot with flame.* God, it was hot all right. And those twenty-watt fluoros weren't doing his eyes any good. *Here and only here, far from the distracting turmoil of the ephemeral surface, Dr. Johnson lives! why can't I say*

adding crowd and have done with it? *man can truly come to terms with his planet, be at one with its dark internal forces. Deep calleth unto deep. 'But sweet as the rind was the core is' wrote Swinburne once, not knowing the core was sweeter yet than ever he guessed. For here, at the still point of the turning world, Drivel, Charles me boy, and you know it. Cross that last bit out, not even the Sunday papers will swallow that 'still point' when I'm nearly four thousand miles from the centre, which is a damn sight hotter than this stinking hole. Let's try the radio for a change.*

After a while, he smiled. Having a heatwave, were they? It had better be good and chilly for his ascent from hell in two weeks.

CRYPTANALYSIS—2

The machinery of Cryptanalysis was in high gear. Their CRETIN computer was hard at work on the mysterious message. Stone waited for the results, nerves on edge. CRETIN: the Cryptanalytic Relational Execution Terminal Interface Network. Or was it right that the acronym referred to the machine's functions of Co-ordination, Relocation, Extrapolation, Triangulation, Incrementation and Notification? It was too hot to think. Or again, it might be—Bzzzzt! After four hours of symbol-juggling, CRETIN had cracked the message. The display screen glowed.

THE SUN IS GOING NOVA, it proclaimed in flashing letters. The output continued smoothly.

—PRELIM

A IS FIRST LETTER OF ALPHABET BUT LAST OF MESSAGE

QUERY IMPLIES ANALYSIS TO START AT END OF MESSAGE

QUERY REVERSE MESSAGE

—REVERSAL

AVON GNI OG SI NUS EHT

(Stone jerked. N.U.S.! What were those students up to now?)

—LOGICAL REARRANGEMENT

AVON GN—TEN—G SINUS EHT

—COMMENTS

/AVON/ - REFERS TO RIVER
 /EHT/ - ELECTRICAL ABBR SIGNIFYING EXTRA HIGH TENSION
 /GN-TEN-G/ - MOST ADVANCED CHINESE COMPUTAPLEX HAS
 CODE GN-NINE-Q - ALSO KNOWN AS BLOSSOMING FLOWER
 OF KNOWLEDGE AND FOUNT OF COOL WATERS OF INSPIRATION
 - THEORISE GN-TEN-G SUPERIOR MODEL OF SAME FAMILY
 /SINUS EHT/ - IN CONJUNCTION WITH ABOVE FACTORS
 SUGGESTS REF TO CHUNG WONG INSTITUTE NR STRATFORD -
 OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE OF THIS ESTABLISHMENT IS CURE OF
 HAY FEVER BY ELECTROTHERAPY AND ACUPUNCTURE
 -CONCLUSION
 CHUNG WONG INSTITUTE IS FRONT FOR COMPUTAPLEX - PUR-
 POSE UNKNOWN
 -FURTHER COMMENTS
 NONE
 ***END PROGRAM
 ***CRYPTAN 4 DECOMPILING
 ***MACHINE CLEARED
 'I'll be damned,' said Stone.

OBSERVATORY—I

'Lovely. Oh, lovely.' Lyman beamed as he examined the negatives. 'A beautiful bit of work, Morgan. Three new spectral lines—wonderful!' In the stifling air of the Salisbury Plain Observatory, the celluloid film was already curling up.

'We'll call them the Morgan lines, of course?' queried the anxious researcher. 'After all, it was my discovery—'

'But I did half the work, remember!' Paschen broke in. Lyman smiled again. 'Just to confuse the issue, boys, do you know that Brackett and Pfund are hard at work producing some explanation of why the solar spectrum is sprouting new lines? Now if they succeed, what can we call them but the Brackett-Pfund lines? You'd better talk to them and come to some agreement.' Lyman's smile became even more seraphic. 'With only three lines and five of us, I admit the naming situation is a little—'

'Five of us?' Morgan shrieked. 'You don't mean—you,

too——' He turned and walked out, followed by Paschen. It didn't do to go too far with the Director.

'Close the door after you,' Lyman called out, as he wrote THE LYMAN EFFECT in neat capitals at the head of a sheet of foolscap.

INTERIM—2

Dr. Apricot always hated this lecture-theatre. In the morning, the sun struck harshly down through the high windows at the rear, blinding him so he lost his audience in the shadowy body of the room. A faint snoring could be heard—in this heat he couldn't blame them. Where was he now—ah yes——

'—we see that although it is often theorised that the flaring of a stellar body into the nova state takes place very rapidly indeed on the cosmic scale it is difficult to estimate precisely the time required for the transition stage in fact when we enjoy unusually hot weather such as we are undergoing at this moment why for all we know we should be making our peace with god and preparing for the end of all things as our sun explodes into incandescent gases ha ha ha——' He was rewarded by two or three polite titters among the snores—intense gratification; some of them are awake! But so hot, so hot . . . He sipped his tepid water and droned on. His next pleasantry produced just one chuckle. Modified rapture.

Half an hour later, when the concentration of sunlight through his water-jug set some papers alight, there was no response at all from the gathered students—a pox on them, they're all asleep now. Apricot poured water over the flames and walked out. Behind him, two hundred earnest seekers after knowledge slept on in happy unawareness.

CRYPTANALYSIS—3

Stone sat listlessly at his desk, doing the *Times* crossword puzzle. What was the country coming to, he wondered, when you had to wear sunglasses indoors. Half the letters in the paper had been complaints about the Met. Office, who were held generally responsible for the heat. He looked longingly at the closed window—last time he'd opened it,

the air had been hotter outside than in. On the street, ten storeys down, people wandered about, fainting alternately into one another's arms. *Hot and scrambled under Stratford* (4) What was *that*? Vague thoughts of eggs drifted in his mind, to be dispelled as Higgins ambled in.

'Noticed something funny about that thing you've got everyone working on,' gasped Higgins, wiping his brow and wringing out the handkerchief into Stone's waste-basket. The Head eyed him with disfavour.

'What?'

'Well, if you take every third letter, starting with that first T, look what you get——' He scribbled on the blotter: The Sun Is gOinG noVa. TSI OGV. 'And now rearrange it——' Underneath, he wrote S VOIGT. 'There! Feel like telling that to Sammy Voigt next door?'

'Um.' Stone buzzed Voigt on the intercom.

'Odd you should call me just then,' said Voigt, coming in with a strange smile. 'Take a look at this, I've been playing anagrams.' The paper he held out had just three lines of writing on it, starting with that hateful message:

(letters of message)	THE SUN IS GOING NOVA
(rearranges to)	A E G G H I I N N O O S S T U V
	STONE HIGGINS OVANU

'Ovanu!' cried Stone. The famed, the legendary double-agent!

'Precisely,' grated Voigt, covering them with a heavy automatic. He turned back his lapel to reveal the large Day-Glo orange badge of Security. 'And now I'd like you to answer a few questions, Mr. Stone!'

INTERIM—3

Prudence String was sitting at her typewriter. She sucked at a cigar and rattled off the conclusion of tomorrow's supercharged philosophy-for-the-masses.

Although your hot and sweaty feet are itching, blame it on the heat; and be not narky to your friends, 'tis not their deeds that shape your ends. So call your neighbour not a sod, the bastard is the work of God: dismiss your anger with a laugh and cool it in an icy bath. Not quite the right tone, maybe, but what the hell? She slid the sheet out of the

typewriter. The *Pray As You Enter* column was one hell of a job. Where was that gin ...?

OBSERVATORY—2

Again, Morgan and Paschen walked in together. Both looked somewhat battered, and there was blood on their knuckles.

'You have come to some agreement?' Lyman asked blandly.

'Yes,' said Morgan. 'Briefly: the faint line in the far ultra-violet is to be called the Lyman-Brackett-Pfund line, while the strong red and bluegreen lines are to be called the Morgan and Paschen lines respectively.' He braced himself for Lyman's counterblast. The furnace-heat of the room (how did the old devil keep so cool?) did nothing for his nerves.

'My dear boy,' murmured the Director, 'I have bad news. The term "the Morgan lines" already exists in quite another context—a series in the hydrogen spectrum, nothing to do with the sun's current anomalies. The same goes for the Paschen, Brackett and even the Pfund series, in memory of your respective namesakes.'

'And so does the Lyman series!' shouted Paschen. 'I just remembered——'

'Let me finish. I've already prepared my paper, "The Lyman Effect", which accounts for the whole thing—something to do with runaway fusion reactions, wouldn't interest you—and have very generously acknowledged your assistance, in a footnote. You can't say fairer than that.

'Now don't be hasty,' he added hastily, 'that paper's already in the post to the Royal Society.'

Morgan approached with glazed eyes. 'Kill!' he suggested. 'Kill!' Paschen agreed.

Lyman sprinted for the door, dodging them both.

'Kill!'

CRYPTANALYSIS—4

Stone's intercom buzzed.

'Answer it!' Voigt ordered. Stone obeyed, panting slightly.

'Mr. Stone? Tugg here. I think I've cracked that message at last! Absurdly simple, like all cryptograms once you know the answer.'

Tugg, thought Stone. *Albert Tugg*. Take every fourth letter in the message, starting with the initial T, and you got TUGGA; Tugg comma A, like the telephone directory? 'How did you do it?' he enquired wearily.

'I ran the computer again, and tied in the MORON banks.'

'The Matrix Oriented Random Operator Nexus?'

'You guessed it. Anyway, it worked and I've got the print-outs here.'

'Bring 'em up!'

'In a minute, I'm still doing my nut down here ...' Click. Off went the intercom. NUT, Stone remembered. Nodal Uncertainty Testing.

They waited in silence, Voigt as coldly hostile as he could be at 96 Fahrenheit. The tea-girl came in and poured a cup all round. None of them drank it.

'Iced tea, please ...' wailed Higgins piteously. They ignored him.

Enter Tugg, stage left, perspiring freely.

'Why Mr. Voigt, what are you doing with that gun?'

'Shut up. Start talking.'

Tugg was only too pleased to explain. 'First I got the idea that the message should be read backwards—in reverse that is—'

'The computer thought of that,' observed Stone dispassionately. He stared at a chocolate bar on the desk, which was flowing out of its wrapper and across some Top Secret files.

'Ah, but I verified it. See, you take the first letter of each word and get T S I G N, which rearranges to STING. Like they say, "the sting's in the tail", so I started from the tail-end of the message.'

A faint, dull thudding noise proved to be Higgins beating his head against the wall.

'But the important thing was—no letter B!'

'What?'

'Yes, I did a complete analysis. The probabilities were 97% that, if a layman were involved, he'd say THE SUN IS

BLOWING UP, and a scientist would say—94.5% probability—THE SUN IS BECOMING UNSTABLE. Both containing a B, you see.'

Voigt's eyes were glassy. Stone muttered something about Ellery Queen.

'Now what is special about B? The answer lies in topology. B is the only letter which comprises two closed loops when written as a capital. With this broad hint in mind, CRETIN analysed the reversed message by assigning as 1 to letters containing one closed loop, such as A, and zero to those with none, like S or E. This produces a *binary number*!' He wrote as follows. AVONGNIOGSINUSEHT. 'The A's and o's are 1, the other letters zero. So we get the binary number 1010000100000000. That is, $2^{16} + 2^{14} + 2^9$, giving 72,342 in decimal, which factorises to 2^9 times 7 times 23. Now d'you see?'

'No!' chorussed the other three. The room shrieked as another ambulance of heatstroke cases went by.

'All right. Look, the prime numbers run 2,3,5,7,11,13,17,19,23,29 and so on. 1 doesn't count, making 2 the first prime, 7 the fourth and 23 the ninth. Thus the message boils down to the 1st prime to the 9th power, times the 4th prime, times the 9th ... leaving us with the four-digit message 1 9 4 9.

'And as it happens,' his voice was heavy with meaning, 'the only person in this building born in 1949 is Clara the tea-girl!'

Suppressing an oath, Voigt picked up his untouched cup—sniffed—

'As I thought! Cyanide!' He charged out of the room. Shots rang out in the corridor. Stone and Higgins shook hands.

'Little does he know,' said Higgins, rubbing the heat-rash on his neck, 'that you poisoned his tea.'

'He does know,' Stone replied with an inscrutable smile. 'But he's on our side. Clara was the only agent of Intelligence left in the building—this was our master-plan to eliminate her.'

'Not so fast, Stone!' They turned. Tugg, by the window, was aiming a light machine-gun at them, and even as they

gaped and screwed up their eyes against the intense light from behind him, he peeled off (with obvious relief) the lifelike rubber mask he wore.

'Ovanu!' they cried with one voice. An earthquake shook the building.

INTERIM—4

FRENCH POWER BONANZA

Solar plant's highest output ever

(My sun in whom I am well pleased...)

TAR MELTS ON M-WAYS!

Drivers told, Stay off major roads

(Motorists of the world unite, you have nothing to choose but the lanes...)

His rivals in the placard line might beat him when it came to novelty, Jones mused, but he won all along the line on simple dignity, even in this ghastly heat...

REPENT

FOR THE END

OF THE WORLD

IS AT HAND

OBSERVATORY—3

Slowly, painfully, Lyman recovered consciousness. He was lying on soft grass, and it was night. Even now, the air was hot and humid. He felt the stinging agony of second-degree sunburn. The aurora borealis danced on the horizon, and the moon shone down, brightly, brightly.

Now he remembered: being chased by the heat-crazed Morgan and Paschen up onto the observatory dome. There, he had thought, he could hold them off for ever. He had reckoned without their devilish cunning. They set the telescope for fast satellite tracking, causing the dome to rotate and throw him off. They must have left him for dead, and rushed to break into the nearby mailbox. He smiled his old smile. Little did they know that he had sent the precious letter by messenger, to go by registered post from the nearest office! He was still too weak to stand—was his leg

broken?—but happily he lay there as the moon shone brightly, far too brightly.

DEEPS—2

The monster lift was ascending the last mile, grinding and swaying. Trente panted in the hot, oppressive air. He was furious. He'd stayed a day late and no relief had turned up. Blast them all, who do they think they are, leaving me down a bloody stifling hole and going away? Power's off, too—dim lights in the lift-cage mean emergency batteries up there. Good thing the lifts work from both ends... He picked up his manuscript (*My Unique Experience In The Depths*. Oh for something *really* unique) and added some dirty comments concerning the International Seismic Research Foundation, inefficiency thereof. Foundation for Assorted Researches into Tectonics, he thought. ISRF ought to change their name... Radio link broken down, no messages for a week, instruments playing up (9.3 Richter readings: really!)—he was sick of it all.

Still hot. It was silly of course, but he could swear it was getting hotter as he neared the surface.

Hotter, hotter, hotter...

HEAL THYSELF

by

JOHN RACKHAM

Through the centuries physicians have been told to go and heal themselves, usually by irate sufferers who gain no cure or respite. We know that faith in the doctor is a powerful ingredient of the healing process and that any questioning of his skill may be counter-productive to success. And yet, always, sometimes subconsciously, sometimes stronger when things go wrong, we are aware that there are difficulties faced by doctors that modern medicine should examine more closely. This story, which might be thought of as the opening shot in a 'what if?' situation, conceals much agony beneath its mild deceptive rural exterior.

HEAL THYSELF

THE SILKILY placid voice shivered the bubble of his meandering thought stream to say,

'This session is complete, Mr. Millar. You may now arise and dress,' and Robert Millar guiltily recovered his attention from a reverie to do with Akademgorodok, where he had been on an assignment only a week ago. One was supposed to lie still for five minutes and concentrate on nothingness, not go chasing in thought all over creation. The thin exercise-mat wasn't enough to take off the hardness of the wood-block floor on the back of his head, his shoulder-blades, his buttocks, his heels. He stirred, winced a little, sat up, and met the deep dark gaze of his instructor-therapist. She was a tiny Tibetan tyrant, dark of hair and complexion. She sat at boneless ease in Padmasana, the Lotus-Seat, and he could feel the cool disapproval that lurked beneath her calm.

'You still do not relax properly, Mr. Millar,' she accused. 'You think too much.'

'I'm all wrong altogether.' He sighed. 'I'm not even the right shape to lie flat on a floor. As for thinking too much, according to you I'm not supposed to think at all.'

'That is correct.'

'I know. But you don't tell me how to stop thinking, do you? And I don't want to hear that "make your mind a blank" advice, thank you. That is exactly the same problem in different words.' He stood up, stretched, then looked down to see that her oval face had tilted to follow his movements. She ignored his gibes. She had heard them before.

'You are rested and refreshed now?'

'Oh yes, thank you.' He could answer that one with perfect honesty. Three quarters of an hour of diligent twisting

and stretching, bending and breathing, rounded off by the five minutes Savasana, the total relaxation of the death-pose, really did sharpen him up. Even if his Western-style body couldn't quite manage all those weird postures, the effort certainly was worth while in its effects. He felt fine. He smiled, bowed ceremoniously to her, then went away to dress, to strip off the minimum cotton leotard of the Institute and put back on the formal shirt, collar, tie, shoes and all the rest of the habiliments of Western man. On his way out he called in on the guru, as he always did before leaving.

Kishri Subadatta and he were old friends, over and above the regular teacher-student relationship. In his professional valence, Millar had once written-up this Institute, and that small publicity had made all the difference between economic failure and its present modest success. Even behind a very modern desk the old man personified all the remotely imperturbable wisdom of the Orient, only his dark eyes moving, and twinkling with genuine pleasure as Millar settled in a chair.

'You are in a state of well-being, my son,' he said. 'It is revealed in your movements.'

'I've felt worse,' Millar agreed. 'End of last week, for instance. What with the Siberian cold, the diet, commissars everywhere, the strictly guided tour, the high-power propaganda in every other word, and the raw naked need to make a good impression, those chaps really worked at it, I'm telling you. I was completely whacked by the time I got back here to London. Without the two or three sessions a week here, I don't know what I'd do.'

'You think too much. You would have ulcers by now, a coronary in five years, and an early grave. He who hurries too much passes by much more than he overtakes.'

'We put it differently. Better a little bit too late down here than too early up there. I wish you could get that attitude of mind across to one or two editors of my acquaintance.' Millar spoke with feeling. As a free-lancing science-writer he had to feed the insatiable appetites of men who wanted the very latest technical news tracked to source, digested, and immediately regurgitated in words

and values that the average laymen could understand without having to think too hard. It was a full-stretch, restless, strenuous life, and he loved it, but there were times—he sighed and repeated, 'Without regular sessions here, with your staff to unwind me, I just couldn't take it.'

Subadatta let the silence stretch a little before he said,

'But what?'

'Eh?' Millar started, stared, but the old man stared him back with a knowing gleam.

'Your tone, your attitude, both betray dissatisfaction.'

'Yes.' Millar put his head on one side apologetically. 'Don't think I'm criticising you. I'm not. You recharge my batteries fine, always. But—I don't know—I get the feeling, somehow, that there's something I miss. That there is more.'

'We keep nothing back. My assistants were trained by me. I have myself conducted your exercises...'

'It's not that. I'm getting the treatment, and it works. But there is still that feeling that it ought to be so much better. Perhaps I've sold myself to my own imagination, but there it is. It's that conviction that if only I could reach out just a bit more...'

'It is not to be reached,' the old man interrupted him. 'You are close. Close enough to sense the real spiritual energy, the surge of inner strength. But one does not reach. Not by effort, or striving. One says "Peace, be still!", and it comes.'

'But that's just the trouble,' Millar complained. 'You say "relax". Let go. Make your mind empty, your body at peace. You say. But I can't. You tell me. Why can't you show me how?'

'Because it cannot be taught, my son. It must be learned. In my training, as in the training of every guru, there was a long beginning time, a trying and frustrating time, when I had to do nothing. My master told me nothing, said nothing to me. I had to learn, of myself, how to do nothing, think nothing and be nothing. It was hard, but necessary. Only this way could I win free of the clutter of outside pressures, patterns and beliefs, the noise in my mind. My son, inside every one of us there is a witless chattering ape, fidgeting, restless, ever inquisitive, unable to keep still. Before any

true self-wisdom can come, that monkey busy-body must be hushed. Even for me, in my country, it was difficult. For such a man as you, continually bathed in the uproar of news, views, imaginations and sensations, it is virtually impossible.'

Millar digested this ruefully. He knew it to be true. Like any other busy man he treasured the rare moments of quiet and solitude which came his way, but he also knew that such moments served merely to skim off the worst of the pressure. The deep-rooted drives remained, had enough power to make him feel guilty and restless if he idled too long.

'I cannot show you how, my son. I can only help a little. I can use words. I can make postures for you to copy. But I cannot share feelings with you. I cannot make your nerves and muscles obey as I can my own. If only I could, my task would be much easier.'

That moment, the genuine regret in the old man's voice and on his seventy-five years young and serene face, lingered in Millar's mind as he went away to keep an appointment. He knew there was truth in what the old man said. Common-sense, alone, made it obvious that if one could only calm the restless stream of thought, and somehow persuade the nerves and muscles to stop fighting each other for a while, all the power of the automatic and unsensed biological processes which labour continuously to maintain the body in action would be able to catch up, would even be able to establish a credit-balance. As any doctor would cheerfully admit, nine times out of ten the body can and will cure itself, if you only give it have a chance. The ideas went round and round in his head, and he had that itchy feeling that he was on the verge of something highly significant, but external events intruded. They always did.

'Something that ought to be right up your street, Millar,' the features editor flipped a card across the desk to him. 'Seems this chap half-promised a paper to the *Lancet*, some new diagnostic tool or technique, but never delivered. Something about needing more research. He's a GP in some one-street village somewhere in Hampshire, but has money

of his own. You care to run down and investigate, on the off-chance?'

Hampshire on a day like this. Stovold. Millar didn't know it, but it could be found easily enough. The lure of a drive in the sunshine was strong, but something else was stronger. Millar studied the meagre details. B. Longley, MD, GP. Married, no children. And the date.

'I was at school with a Bruce Longley,' he said. 'And the date's right. Always did claim he was going for medical research. If it is old "Longlegs" after all these years—Lord! You bet I'm going to chance it. Right away!'

'Good lad! Keep in touch!' The editor flashed a brief smile and then switched to other business, reached for his telephone.

The drive was a delight, the rolling green countryside was at its best, and the little village of Stovold was a perfect ending to the journey. In the cluster of quiet houses drowsing in the arms of the hillside in the early afternoon sunshine, Millar had no trouble at all in finding the side lane which led to the 'doctor's' house. There was a garden that looked well-cared for, a front door standing ajar under a porch where a myriad tiny roses had lured a droning swarm of foraging bees. Millar knocked, and felt almost ashamed to disturb such an idyll. It seemed an unlikely spot to unearth a researcher, but Millar didn't let that thought worry him unduly. Inspiration doesn't select targets by looks. Newton must have been sitting close to an apple tree, after all.

A woman came to the door to offer him a polite but bewildered smile. It took a second look at close quarters for him to realise that she was not quite as old as the worry lines on her face would have suggested. If he was reading those signs of strain aright, this was not the peaceful Eden it seemed.

'Sorry to disturb,' he said. 'My name's Robert Millar. I fancy it's your husband I want to see. Dr. Longley?'

She took his card with reluctant finger-tips. 'Is it very important, Mr. Millar? You see, he's resting just now, in the back garden. I would much rather he wasn't disturbed. He's not at all well.'

'I'm sorry to hear that. I've just driven all the way from London. Stupid of me, I should have phoned. Look,' he put on his best smile, 'if you would just ask him? If I'm right, we were at school together. Bedlows. I used to know him as "Longlegs" and he would remember me as "Stinky" Millar. Sorry if that sounds like something out of a book, but I assure you it's true. Schoolboys aren't too wonderfully original, I'm afraid. Does that make any difference?'

It certainly made a difference to her smile, and took years from her age at the same time.

'I do hope you're right, Mr. Millar. A nice long chat with an old friend is exactly what he needs just now. There just isn't anyone—do please come in.' The passage was cool and dim, leading right through the house to the brightness of the garden beyond. Within seconds she had reappeared, waving him to come.

'He's out there on the lawn. Have you had lunch, Mr. Millar?'

'Please don't bother, Mrs. Longley. I wouldn't dream...'

'Rubbish!' She cut him short with a snort. 'You'll be doing me a boon if you'll just sit there and eat, and let him see you. It might encourage him to take something too. He has been so difficult these past weeks, I'm at my wit's end. You go on, now. I'll bring it out to you.'

There was a narrow gravel strip and then the carpet of grass bordered by glowing flower-beds. A deck-chair under a gaudy sunshade. A man climbing to his feet and turning. A lean hang-shouldered man with a haggard face, and the hand he held out in greeting was none too steady. Millar stared, tried not to, but was so shocked by what he saw that conventional commonplaces deserted him entirely. With the rough familiarity of long ago he blurted:

'Good God, Longlegs, what the devil have you been doing with yourself?'

Longley managed a wry smile and clung to the hand-shake as if afraid to let go. 'The voice of sanity! Takes me back a few years. Millar, it's good to see you. Sit down, won't you? You haven't changed much. I'm a wreck and I know it. You see it. You've said it. How many of the others

would have said as much, eh? Willers, Ponsonby, Coates—any of 'em?'

'I never did have any tact,' Millar mumbled. 'Always blurting things out. I should have learned better by now. You've been ill, of course.'

'Never had a day's sickness in twenty years. Can't afford to. I'm a doctor, you see. You knew that, didn't you?'

'Oh yes. You always did say you were going medical. But I always took that to mean research.'

'Pottering away in some subsidised laboratory, going through the prescribed and approved motions? Not me. Ah, that's very thoughtful of you, my dear. You'll stay, of course... look here, I can't call you Stinky, can I? And I'm afraid I've forgotten—no, wait a moment, I haven't. Robert?'

'Right. Nothing wrong with your memory, old man. And you're Bruce.'

'Splendid. Of course you've already met Dorothy. My dear, haven't we anything better than still lemonade?'

'Not for me.' Millar objected hastily. 'Home made lemonade is exactly what I need just now.' He eyed the tray she had brought and there was no need at all to pretend enthusiasm. 'Salad fresh from the soil, this morning's eggs, cream cheese, fresh butter and real bread! It's a feast, Mrs. Longley. You have no idea how refreshing it is.'

He had a further reward in seeing the heartfelt relief on her face as her husband showed signs of being interested in the fare. The man was gaunt. Millar remembered him as being lean and intense, even as a youth, but that was a vastly different thing from this near-emaciation. And there were claw-marks of pain and sorrow on that face too. 'We're the same age!' he told himself, and found it hard to believe.

'Well now.' Longley shook sugar on to a crisp leaf of lettuce and then rolled it into a stick, ready to bite. 'And what brings you to this forgotten backwater, and my door?'

'Your research,' Millar told him bluntly. 'I'm a science-writer, Bruce. That's as far as my "stinks" took me.' He felt the sudden chill his words had brought but he went steadily

on. 'I came professionally, but I've been met and made welcome as a friend. So—if you'd rather I dropped the whole subject, just say so and I will. On the other hand if you feel like talking you have my assurance that nothing you say will be written up, or even repeated, unless you approve. There it is. If you want to throw me out now, I wouldn't blame you one bit.'

For the space of three breaths a ghost hovered over Longley's head. Then he smiled ruefully. 'I should have guessed, I suppose. And it really doesn't make any difference. In fact...' a thoughtful gleam came into his eyes, '... science-writer, eh? The eclectic view. Can't say I'm surprised. You always did have the knack of getting right to the meat of a thing. You remember that time when old Masterson had just finished taking us through Newton's First Law. "To every action there must be an opposite and equal reaction." And you said "It sounds as though the Universe is deliberately designed so that we can't get something for nothing!" Remember?'

'That was a quote.' Millar chuckled. 'Not original.'

'But true, nevertheless.' Longley crunched on his lettuce for a while. 'My research, for instance. Suppose I told you that I have indeed discovered something extremely valuable, but utterly useless. Eh?'

'You'd have to go further than that. Define your terms. You can't put "valuable" and "useless" opposite each other that way, not and make sense.'

'Oh, but I can, you know. Valuable? Of value. Useless? Cannot be used.' He took another leaf, sugared it deliberately. 'Ever been ill, Robert? Bad enough to go to a doctor, I mean? Did you have trouble explaining and describing your symptoms? Most people do. But did you ever think about the opposite side of the coin, about a chap in my position?' Longley was intense now, his gaunt face alight with some inner emotion.

'They come into my consulting room to be questioned. "What seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Jones? Where does it hurt? How does it feel?"' He screwed his face up in distaste. 'How does it feel? Do you realise, Robert, what an impos-

sible question that is? Of course the poor woman tries to tell me. But can she? Can you? Can anyone tell anyone else how they feel, really?'

'I'd never thought of it before.' Millar tried the idea for himself and was disconcerted. 'But surely,' he objected, 'this is where your training comes in. Observation, known symptoms, experience, that kind of thing?'

'Of course I have training. So does any qualified man. But let me put it to you this way. I imagine a good motor mechanic could tell you quite a lot about an engine just by listening to it. But you try running your car into a garage and telling the mechanic you want it diagnosed and repaired, without lifting the bonnet! Yet that's what a doctor has to do. He has to diagnose the state of the most complex and delicate piece of machinery in the world from external evidence, plus experience, plus a layman's uninformed report. Which is usually biased, at that.'

'I hadn't thought of it like that,' Millar said, and the more he did think of it the more monstrous it seemed. Longley went on:

'We have a battery of techniques, of course. We measure things like temperature, respiration, pulse rate and pressure, we take swabs, biopsy samples, blood tests. We observe, we deduce, and, all things considered, we do wonderfully well. But just think, Robert, what a tremendous difference it would make if I could "feel" exactly what my patient is feeling!'

'Good Lord!' Millar stopped chewing to stare. 'How did you hope to do that? By telepathy? Telepathy, I should say.'

'Alas, no. That little trick is still science-fiction, so far as I'm aware. But there is a way.'

'You mean you've succeeded? The lead I got was that you'd devised some diagnostic technique or gadget, but—you mean you can actually share physical sensations with your patients?'

'Oh yes.' Longley said it heavily, not in triumph. 'It was a very simple thing, really. In essence, that is. Dorothy, my dear...' he looked up absently, and then blinked. 'Now where on earth can she have gone? Ah well, no matter, I

can show you the gadget itself later on. A pity to go indoors now and waste this glorious sunshine.' He straightened a little in his seat, became more positive now that he was on familiar ground.

'You ought to be able to follow the basic theory well enough. You know that the body maintains its internal communication by various media, but mainly by the nervous system. And that, when you get down to it, is nothing more than a chemico-electrical network. A flow of impulses, and all in binary form, the "all or nothing" of a synapse. If I prick your finger, what happens in actual fact is that a number of sensitive cells are affected, they transmit impulses to your brain where they are decoded and you "know" that your finger hurts. At the risk of being tedious, let me stress, you "know" only what your brain decodes from a set of impulses. If I could somehow feed into your brain such a message—from some other source—your brain would still "know" that your finger had been hurt. Conversely, if I could catch that impulse-stream and feed it into my brain, I would know that my finger was hurt. I would be deceived, you see? In exactly the same way, if you took up a telephone in the village, rang me, and said "Hello, this is Robert Millar, speaking to you from London." I wouldn't know any different. I merely accept and understand the message. Now, add to that the fact that all the nerve messages from the body *must* pass here...' he put up his hand to pat the nape of his neck, '... through the main nerve trunk, on their way to the root-brain, the medulla oblongata...'

'Here you are, darling,' Mrs. Longley put down a squat black bakelite box with dials and jack-leads not much bigger than the portable tape-recorder Millar often used for transient ideas. 'I was a nurse once,' she explained, with a bright smile. 'One learns to anticipate.'

'You're familiar with this thing, then?' Millar stared at it askance.

'Oh yes. I was the passive guinea-pig from the start. Bruce, dear, do eat up. Talk if you must, but eat, too.'

Longley looked apologetic, sheepish, but enthusiastic too. Between mouthfuls he sketched in the tedious

months, the struggle to absorb enough electronics to serve his need, the contriving, the often desperate stratagems to describe and order special parts without betraying too much of what they were for. And the regular frustration.

'But I got it, you know, in the end. A simple collar, this part, to fit snug to the neck, and on this inner surface an array of sensors to pick up the minute magnetic fields generated by the nerve-impulse flows. Into here and amplified, naturally, and the output into *this* collar, which superimposes the identical pattern on my nervous system. You see? As I explained to Dorothy, once, it's very like a telephone. You speak into one end. From that moment it is nothing more than a patterned series of impulses. A sensitive detector anywhere along the line could pick them up as flows of electrical patterns. But it is not until there is sound, an ear, and a brain, at the other end, that you have speech once more. In the same way, these impulses do not mean anything until they feed into a brain. And because your brain always and only receives messages from your body, it so translates these. You see?'

Millar sat quite still and stared at the innocent-looking thing for a long while. He was not now concerned with how it was done. It worked. He was prepared to take Longley's word for it. But the possibilities it opened up were enough to scare him, at first. Then, with an effort, he hauled his soaring imagination back to more prosaic things.

'There's a snag, isn't there? You haven't said so, not in so many words. But it's written all over you. And you said it was useless, I remember.'

Longley grew old again. As he took up his glass the slightly cloudy lemonade in it shivered to his agitation.

'In a way, Robert, there's nothing wrong with it. The fault is in me. I am not the man I thought I was. Mirror, mirror, on the wall; who...'

'Stop it!' Millar ordered firmly. 'Stop that! You, a doctor, giving way to hysteria! Get a grip on yourself, man!'

Longley shuddered, but the brusque advice got through to him. He managed unsteady words. 'You're quite right. I'm sorry, I'll watch it. But it is the simple truth, Robert. You call me a doctor. What does that mean? This little device

of mine has shown me, rubbed my nose in the fact, that I know a little, a precious little, about sickness, injury, abnormality and disease—but nothing at all about health!’ He put down the glass, took a deep breath. ‘My practice, here, is small. I chose it for that reason. Cuts and bruises, sprains and fractures, the odd hangover here and there, those are my staples. For them I need no machine at all. But there is a small hard core of more persistent things. Afflictions of the elderly and infirm, the chronic backaches and bellyaches, the hypochondriacs. Do you know what ails them, at bottom? Nothing more than the cumulative results of years of abuse, through ignorance. They do not know, never have known, how to stand, sit or lie down, how to walk, or lift, or grasp. They don’t know how to breathe, or what to eat, or when, or how much—or when to leave off. They abuse the most wonderful machine in the world, and the only one they’ll ever get. And all by sheer deadly ignorance. So, when the battered and abused frame reaches the point where it can no longer repair itself, they come to me. To me and thousands like me. They say “Give me a bottle, doctor, or a tablet, or some liniment, to make me feel better.” That’s the cry.’

Millar was silent, guessing what was coming.

‘They tell me how they feel. And, with this, I know how they feel. My God how I know! They hurt! With this thing I get all their warps and crookednesses, all the wrenching twists and aches and pains. I feel them!’

And now Millar knew why his old friend looked two decades more than his real age, and why Dorothy Longley looked haggard. But Longley was going on.

‘I want to tell them, to yell at them “You don’t need mixtures and tablets at all. You need to stop doing this and that, and start doing the other thing. Stand up! Breathe! Stop stuffing yourself with lard and starch! Cut out all that beer. For pity’s sake, relax and give your body a chance!” That’s what I ought to tell them. But I can’t!’

‘Why not? Why can’t you?’

‘Because, my dear man, you can’t do that. They wouldn’t understand. You can’t give a man words. You have to show him. And how can I show anyone else how to live? I say to

you “Bend your finger, like this!” And you ask me, in return. “How do I do that, doctor?” And I can’t tell you. No one can.’

There was a silence into which bees buzzed and the breeze whispered its private secrets over the grass while Millar pondered the trap. Share a man’s sensations and you become as he is. And if he is busy ruining and crippling himself, then he will ruin and cripple you too. But you can’t stop, because you’re a doctor, and you’ve sworn an oath to heal, to do your best. Even if you don’t know what to do, you must still do your best. A trap, and it was visibly killing Longley. And that was here, in this quiet and comparatively healthy country village. What would it do to the busy, overworked GP in town? Millar shivered at the grisly thought.

‘I don’t blame you for not wanting to publish this. It would be murder!’

‘I know that,’ Longley nodded. ‘You see what it has done to me. But what of the other side? Have I the moral right to withhold, to suppress something which could save lives? Even just one life?’

‘It’s a trap, all right,’ Millar sighed. Dorothy Longley rose, began gathering in the plates and dishes.

‘It’s so unfair,’ she said, very quietly. ‘It may be wicked of me, but there are times when I wish that thing would work the other way round, to let other folk know just a little of what *he* is suffering!’ She stalked off with the tray. Millar stared after her, struck by a sudden wild surmise.

‘See here!’ he spun back to Longley. ‘Why not?’ As Longley frowned in bafflement he repeated. ‘Why not? Why can’t you reverse the thing, step up the amplification if necessary, and impose a set of remedial “sensations” on your patient? That would be “showing”, wouldn’t it?’

Longley smiled, but it was a dreadful grimace with no mirth in it. ‘I had thought of that, Robert. It would work, of course. I could impose my body patterns on a patient, truly. But, I ask you again, what does it mean to say that I am a doctor? What do I know about health, about the right ways of acting, living, breathing. Who am I? All my train-

ing, the years of study, of laboratory work, anatomy and physiology, the ward-walking, the examinations and diplomas—those were all to do with sickness. Nowhere in all that time was there any instruction in how to be fit and healthy. How can I show someone else how to do something I don't know?'

Millar began to glow, to tingle with hot and bubbling ideas. 'How would you like to learn?' he demanded, and Longley raised his eyebrows in astonishment but Millar laughed and was suddenly fervent. 'Can you get a locum for a week or two? Can you come with me, right away—well, this evening, say—and put yourself in the hands of someone who *can* show you how? And bring your gadget. Oh yes, definitely, bring your gadget. With that I can positively guarantee you will learn everything you need to know.'

'What on Earth are you talking about?'

'You'll see. Man, this is going to be the most wonderful thing that ever happened to you. And me, too!' That sudden realisation shook him silent for a moment. Now, at last, he was going to be able to reach out and take the "power" that he knew was there. 'Just say you'll do it, that's all. I'll explain later. Can't do any harm, could do the most amazing good. You will?'

'Oh, very well.' Longley shrugged. 'I have a holiday due anyway.'

Millar rose at once, demanding to be shown the telephone.

'Do remember to dial "01" first.' Mrs. Longley warned him, and he nodded absently, watching the dial spin beneath his fingers. There came a well-remembered, placid voice, and he said,

'Robert Millar here, guru. I have another pupil for you. A very special pupil indeed. And a method, a technique that will interest you ...'

THE OBSERVER

by

GRAHAM CHARNOCK

Jocaster, a backwater planet with a right to boast, had been designed specifically to stir wonder in the souls of its visitors. Beauty may lie in the eye of the beholder; that does not mean whatever obverses exist are not as real as the seen. In his first story for New Writings in SF, Graham Charnock evokes a mood of solitariness despite the action taking place on a tourist planet.

THE OBSERVER

KLEIN sat on the terrace at dusk. The air was saturated with a preternatural golden light. He moved his hand through it experimentally and inspected his fingertips, half-expecting to see some sheen, some metallic patina, deposited on them. It struck him then that there might, quite literally, be something in the air—crystal motes, perhaps, seeded in the atmosphere by the worldscapers of Jocaster to diffuse and transfigure the rays of the setting sun.

The idea made his skin crawl. He had never wanted, never asked for this assignment in the first place. The sad thing was, of course, that he had never been in the position to refuse it.

He turned his attention to his hand, still raised, to his fingers. They were thick and blunt—meant, in another age, to tear at rock and scrabble in the earth, to shift, arrange and build. On occasions he was conscious of their ugliness: beside the delicate hand of a woman; holding a slim, sharply-pointed stylus; or whenever reaction to strenuous exertion made them tremble.

They were trembling now, for no real reason, and he loosened his grip on the air and allowed his hand to fall back lazily into his lap.

‘What are you looking at?’

It was Magnus. In the short time he had known him, Klein had grown to hate the fragile young man. Magnus was the ghost that was never far away, calling to him from purgatory, beckoning him to cross the line. Klein hated his closeness.

‘I’m indulging myself,’ Klein said. ‘For once, I’m not looking at anything.’

'Do you mind if I sit down?'

Klein answered with a slight shrug.

Magnus sat down beside Klein. He was indeterminately young, his hair cut so short as merely to soften an effect of baldness. He was, as ever, calm, relaxed, with a slight supercilious set to his lips.

'Mr. Klein...?'

The query hung in the air, begging some kind of reaction. After a moment, Klein nodded.

'Mr. Klein,' Magnus continued, 'I admire your work greatly. I would like to talk to you about it.'

'Until I came here,' said Klein, 'you knew nothing of my work.'

'That's true. I knew only of your reputation. But don't you think, to a degree, a man is his reputation? You see, I feel I knew a lot about you before you ever came to Jocaster; now, of course, I know a great deal more.'

'You've researched me, you mean.'

Magnus nodded. 'Our circumstances differ and yet, you must admit, there are these points of contact. You too must place great emphasis on research, I imagine.'

Klein laughed suddenly.

'I amuse you?' Magnus asked.

'You amuse me. You're very engaging—very clever. I wonder what you're doing here.'

Magnus smiled, and gave a deferential nod. 'We are both servants, Klein. You are a servant of your public and I... I am *your* servant. We both have our responsibilities.'

'You're my servant then, are you?' said Klein, interested despite himself in the trend of the conversation. 'Let me ask you this: suppose I were to get it into my head to do away with myself, say by jumping from this terrace. What would you, as my servant, do?'

'I would feel compelled to stop you.'

'Even though I sincerely wished to die? You would act *against* my wishes?'

'I would look at it this way: one can wish to die at one instant and wish to live the next. When one is dead, however, one cannot wish at all. Yes, I would stop you. I would give you the chance to change your mind, as many chances

as you needed, if it came to it. I would act in accordance with what I considered your best interests.'

'You would know, then, what my best interests were?'

'Possibly not. But I would ask you to trust me.'

'And why should I do that?'

'Because our relationship is clear, our roles are defined. A master should always trust his servant or else the servant's judgement is undermined and he cannot function properly. You must find this yourself, surely. People trust you. People trust your reputation. They build their view of the universe on what you and colleagues report. That's your entire *raison d'être*. When trust ends you either become dishonest or a slave, just as you do when you yourself compromise that trust.'

'You take your job very seriously,' Klein said.

'Of course,' Magnus said, obviously surprised. 'Doesn't everyone? I take everything seriously. I try to compromise as little as possible. In particular I try to steer a positive course away from dogma and mental laziness. I find it helps to keep me loose and supple if I open my mind to paradox, play hunches. It's a weird, inverted kind of discipline, an intuitive one. Do you know what I mean?'

Klein said, softly: 'I thought you were interested in my work?'

'I am,' Magnus said. 'That's what we've been talking about.'

Magnus stood, went to the terrace rail and looked down towards the beach. After a moment he turned back to Klein.

'The skater is due to depart shortly,' he said. 'Your colleagues are already boarding. Will you join them?'

Klein shook his head. 'I believe I'll just sit here. I've had enough sensory experience for one day. I'm a tired man.'

'Is there anything I can get you?'

'A whisky perhaps.'

The conversation had put Klein in a reflective mood, but he was too weary, too mentally depleted, to push any of his thoughts through to a conclusion. Like large boulders, they rolled a little way and no further. He felt a tinge of resent-

ment towards the way his schedule had been organised for him, leaving him little enough time for basic privacy, let alone independent investigation. Manipulation. It all boiled down to manipulation. Once he had believed that the manipulation of the environment was one thing and the manipulation of people was another. If he was going to bring any message away from Jocaster, perhaps it should be that the two were inextricably intertwined. It was a message that would not make him popular with the world-scapers of Jocaster. They might, he thought sardonically, never invite him back again.

Magnus bought Klein his whisky and then left him alone once more on the terrace, looking out across the placid bowl of the lake below and towards the distant mile-high quartzite crag that rose from its centre. At this distance, the massive waterfall that cascaded from the crag's lip was only a blur, the spray a miasmic veil of shifting rainbow colours englobing the whole crag.

Klein took a sip from his drink—it was scotch whisky all right, the real thing, and good too.

But that was all part of Jocaster's boast. Everything on the planet was real. Everything, thought Klein, except the planet itself. Great oaks from little acorns grew, and mighty planets from metaphysical acorns of aggregated matter—a backwater world, a bleak globe of rock, water, gas and organic material sculpted into a thing of transcendental beauty.

Jocaster's orange sun was slowly descending now towards a liaison with the stump of stone and its frozen whorls of transparent and translucent strata. Below him, on the beach, the anti-gravity skater had taken the last of its passengers aboard. Soon it would start out on its trip through the flying spray of the waterfall, and through the weirdly chiming tunnel that had been hollowed through the heart of the glowing crystal.

For a moment Klein felt a pang of regret as he thought of what he would be missing. There was no point in being blasé about it. Jocaster had been designed specifically to stir wonder in the soul of its visitors. It was powerful magic, all right. The effect, even now, of the sun backlight-

ing the distant crag, was enough to make even the most weary heart leap.

Why then did his heart not leap?

He knew the answer. Because it was distrust and not mere weariness that inhabited him. Like Magnus, his ghost, he believed his intuition, and his intuition had always taught him that vast beauty was paid for with vast ugliness, that the one fed on the other. Jocaster was—or seemed to be—pure beauty; it thumbed its nose at his carefully wrought beliefs.

He was becoming jaded, cynical and a little alone. Roll a thought around the grey matter too long, Klein pondered, and it comes out grey. The only answer for that was professionalism.

The crystal crag. How to describe it? It would come to that eventually.

Put it in a tri-d frame? That wasn't his job. That was the job of the journalist. And anyway, the crag's spectacle, its wonder, was in its scale and its setting. Shrink it to the size of a layer-cake and set it in the corner of some squalid living compartment, and the wonder would evaporate.

An approach, then, through the emotions of the observer? A poem—in words, or light, or sound, or sensation. Or all four. And the distrust—where did that stand? How to paint distrust? How to model what was after all something negative rather than something positive, an absence rather than a presence? How to suggest the niggling itch of doubt without becoming too didactic? Or perhaps a totally didactic approach was necessary...

There was nothing new about these problems. They were the familiar ones of his profession. But applied to Jocaster they seemed more pronounced than ever.

He took a small notebook from his pocket and began to draft some notes in a quick flowing script.

A voice at his shoulder said: 'How charmingly atavistic.'

'This?' Klein laid down the notebook and looked up. 'I'm fast coming to the conclusion that I'm an atavistic man, Miss Silver. I come from an atavistic world, after all. Won't you sit down?'

The woman, suspended in her mid-thirties by anti-sen drugs, was tall and attractive with a head of flowing dark hair that gave the lie to her name. Klein knew her only slightly, less than intimately, although he hoped to change that. She took a seat opposite him.

'What's that you're drinking?' she asked.

'Whisky.' He passed her the glass. 'Would you like to try it?'

Miss Silver sipped it tentatively, wrinkled her nose and set the glass down. 'This too is atavistic,' she said.

'Most of our pleasures are.'

'We've had so little chance to talk, and I've very much wanted to,' the woman said. 'You seem different from the others. What is this world of yours called?'

'It's called Earth.'

'The name is familiar.'

'Some say it's the precolonial home of the human race. It's of little importance whether it is or it isn't. The universe is too big for pilgrimages, and Earth too small. Still, it's a pleasant place—for atavists.'

Below them the anti-gravity skater pulled away from the crescent edge of fine sand. They watched it sweep out, wakeless, across the water.

'Come down to the beach with me,' said Klein. 'We'll be alone.'

They made brutal love. She lay on her back, beached like a soft-bellied turtle, his nails scouring her flesh until she screamed. It was long and bitter, their striving, and it left them bruised, the distensions of their flesh and the open wounds of their lust slow to heal.

Away across the lake the crag burned a dull red as if harbouring the last embers of a monumental fire.

'Why didn't you go with the skater?' Klein asked her.

Black blood had dried in a fine line where his nails had torn her cheek. She touched the wound absently.

'I intended to go. But I saw you were staying. I thought it might be more profitable to stay as well. And to talk to you.'

'Profitable in terms of what?'

'We're in the same profession, Klein. It's conceivable we might have the same reactions to some things. One may know how to articulate those reactions in a way the other doesn't. We both might learn something.'

Klein was silent.

'What do you think of the crag?' Miss Silver asked.

'It's Niagara writ large.'

'Niagara?'

'A honeymoon resort on Earth. It has a waterfall too.'

'I see—a facetious answer. Doesn't the crag impress you at all?'

'It does ... and yet ...'

'You are uneasy. It lacks something?'

'Mingled beauty and ugliness,' Klein said, reaching out to remove her hand from her cheek.

They came from the forest that fringed the beach. They were naked and old, with wrinkled skin and fringes of beard. They bore torches, flaming stumps of wood, and there were perhaps a hundred of them.

'What's going on?' said Klein.

Magnus leant forward, braced against the terrace-rail.

'It's the forest-people,' he said. 'They're just savages.'

'But they're beautiful,' said Miss Silver.

'Savages,' Magnus repeated. 'They're only pseudo-hominids. They rear their young from eggs, like lizards. On the Crooke-Bowles scale they are only——'

'They're still beautiful.'

As darkness and the cool of night touched the crag, a strange thing happened. Shards and slabs of crystal flexed, planes shifted. The crag became an enormous amplifier for the tiny sound-and-light source Jocaster's engineers had seeded at its core.

From across the water—coruscating light, a riot of spectral colour, a symphony of harmonics.

It was too much, thought Klein. Too beautiful.

Silently, almost stoically, it seemed, the forest-people entered the water, still carrying their torches held aloft, lighting their way until the last moment when the water swamped them. They began to swim, a poorly co-ordinated

dog-paddle out towards the flaming re-born image of the crystal.

'I don't understand,' said Klein. 'What are they doing?'

'It's the season of birth,' Magnus told him. 'There would not be food enough to feed the young if the old did not die. They are poor swimmers, as you see. None will reach the crag.'

'Why do they do it this way? Why this ritual?'

Magnus smiled and gestured out over the terrace-rail.

'See, the display ends. The crystal stabilises itself.' He turned away. 'The forest-people are primitive. Who knows what the crag represents for them.'

Klein watched the sparks of colour subside as silence returned.

The next morning Klein, Miss Silver, and the other observers boarded an anti-gravity transport. They had a tight schedule and many more wonders to see.

The transport rose and circled once over the lake. From the window Klein caught a brief glimpse of two skaters moving on the water, netting the floating bodies of the drowned forest-people.

Beside him, Miss Silver was speaking softly into a molecular-flow recorder. She hadn't cleaned or dressed the wound on her cheek. Klein ordered a whisky, opened his own notebook on his lap and, warmed and relaxed by the alcohol, began to write.

CASSIUS AND THE MIND-JAUNT

by

COLIN KAPP

Dr. Andrea Cass had a way with her, a very special way, and Martin Sawyer discovered something of that way when he ventured into Tavener's model as a naïve cognicenter. These are the streets through which imagination roams, the territories of dream and nightmare, reflections of a land built in the soft pulp of another man's brain.

CASSIUS AND THE MIND-JAUNT

ONE

'Doctor Martin Sawyer?'

Sawyer hesitated. The Autumn evening in south London was misty and raw, and the rain had scarcely ceased. A continuous line of vehicles from the research establishment edged through the puddles on his right, intent on gaining a place on the already overcrowded highway. In front of him, the bright flare of passing headlamps against the unlit background, and the rising steam of vehicle exhausts coloured red by tail-lights, was like a preview of a cold corner of Hell. Against such impressions he found it difficult to identify the person who had spoken.

'Yes. I'm Sawyer. But I wasn't expecting...'

'No. But we were expecting you.' A cased, white card flashed briefly. 'Ministry of Security, Scientific Branch. We'd like a word with you. Please don't give any trouble.'

Sawyer started to protest, but a firm grip on his arm cautioned him that his interceptor was not going to be easily dissuaded.

Around the corner, a discreet black car was tucked into the end of a slip-road. It contained a driver, and another occupant in the rear seat. Sawyer was motioned to join him.

'Meet Tony Haven, U.S. Technical Defence Department,' said the M.O.S. man as he climbed into the front seat. 'My name's Watman, and you're too well known to us to need any introduction, Doctor Sawyer. I guess that makes the party complete.'

'Glad to know you, Martin!' said the American, holding

out a huge hand. 'Let's get the hell out of here. There's no percentage to be gained by keeping Cassius waiting.'

'What's this all about?' asked Sawyer, as the car swept out into the traffic.

'You'll be told when we get there,' said Watman.

'Am I under arrest or something?'

'Of course not. You volunteered to come. It's pure coincidence your door can't be opened from the inside.'

'At least let me phone my home. I've another appointment this evening.'

'It's all been taken care of. As far as the world's aware, you're catching an evening flight to Stockholm. Nobody'll miss you for at least a week. So you might as well relax and enjoy the ride.'

'Where're you taking me?'

'If he told you, you'd not believe it,' said the big American. 'You're going on a walkabout.'

'I doubt it. But in any case, why me?'

'It has to be you, Martin. You happen to be the only one who can find his way around.'

Sawyer found that this enigma was all the information he was going to get before they reached their destination. The others refused to be drawn. He had to be content with reading the route signs as the car threaded through London and settled on a steady heading north.

They were obviously in for a long journey. Tony Haven, the big American, shifted his bulk uneasily until he found a comfortable position, then he dropped off to sleep. His snores easily rivalled the sound of the engine. Watman, in the front seat, also relaxed; but it was certain that any movement on Sawyer's part would have triggered him into instant action. Sawyer tried to keep awake, but he knew from the distances covered between his periodic viewings of the road signs, that he must occasionally have dozed off.

Eight hours and two stops later—stops at which his every movement had been supervised by Haven—they reached their destination. They were now well into Scotland and away from any major towns. Because he had no knowledge

of the area, the local place-names meant nothing to Sawyer. He had a brief impression of a group of huts, a gate with a sentry who waved them through down an unmade road, and then a final sweeping halt in front of a large house carved back into the side of a hill.

'This is as far as I go,' said Watman, conversationally. 'If you'll come into the office, Doctor Sawyer, I'll get you signed over.'

'Signed over to whom?'

'Cassius, of course. It's her show. And right glad I am to be out of it.'

'What happens then?'

The M.O.S. man scowled. 'Look, chum, I don't know, and I don't feel inclined to ask. Take it up with Major Miller. He's handling the affairs for our end.'

The big American laid a heavy arm across Sawyer's shoulder. 'Goddammit, Martin, cheer up! You're going to have the chance to take part in a great experiment. Great!'

His enthusiasm lasted all of the five steps which took them inside the door.

The place had the air of once having been a private hotel. At the counter, a British Army Sergeant laid some papers out and motioned for Sawyer to sign.

'What's this in aid of?' asked Sawyer, viewing the scheme reluctantly.

'Official Secrets—Special Powers Act, sir. You sign at the bottom there.'

'Give me one good reason why I should.'

The orderly looked quizzically at Haven. 'If you don't sign, sir, you can't be admitted,' he said.

'That suits me fine. I don't want to be admitted. I wasn't too keen on the exercise, anyway.' Sawyer turned to go, but the big American was blocking his path.

'Steady a minute, Martin! You're kind of an important guy to this project. You're not going to let a little piece of paper stand in the way.'

'Then you sign it. I didn't ask to come here, and I don't intend staying. I'm certainly not signing anything.'

'Mar-tin!' said Tony Haven. 'Stop taking yourself so

seriously. You've been co-opted on to a secret project. Is that what you wanted to know?'

'What project, and what's the extent of my participation?'

'That I can't tell you unless you sign the paper.'

'Then you can go to hell as far as I'm concerned.'

The argument was interrupted by the return of the M.O.S. man, accompanied by an army major.

'All set?' asked the major brightly.

'He hasn't signed the forms yet, sir,' said the sergeant.

'I don't intend to,' said Sawyer. 'Furthermore I want an explanation as to why I was brought here.'

The major looked at Tony Haven then back at Sawyer, 'Hmmm! In the circumstances, I think we're prepared to dispense with the formalities—if that's all right with you colonials, Haven?'

'I guess it'll have to be OK. It's either that or break his arm in the attempt. If there's any query you can always say he was granted temporary American citizenship. Very temporary!'

The last phrase seemed a huge joke, but its import was lost on Sawyer.

'Very well, Martin—you're in!' Haven beckoned Sawyer to go before him into the office. The major came too, and closed the door carefully. Sawyer was motioned to take a seat.

'My name's Miller—Intelligence Liaison. You've been brought here—in what I gather was an unorthodox manner—to take part in an experiment.'

'Why me?'

'Several reasons. One is that you're a qualified research physicist, and can therefore make sense of certain information you may acquire. The other reason is that you're very well acquainted with Professor Alec Tavener, both professionally and socially. The two reasons together make you the only man for the job.'

'How's Alec Tavener concerned in this?'

'Although you may know him well, there's a few things about Tavener you probably don't know. Two years ago

he left England to work in Helsinki. The truth is that he didn't remain in Finland. He went across the Russian border to become engaged in some top-secret work on the Russian hydrogen-fusion programme.'

'I don't believe it. I've had regular letters from Helsinki.'

'We've read them, Doctor Sawyer. But they weren't written there. They were smuggled back across the border for posting.'

'I refuse to believe that Alec defected.'

'I didn't say that. We just don't know what sort of pressures might have been applied, or whether he went willingly or not. But we do know for a fact that for twenty months Professor Tavener was working in Russia. We also know it for a fact that his laboratory there made a major breakthrough in fusion containment technique. This has put practical fusion power well within the Russians' grasp. On current estimates that gives them better than a twenty year lead over Western technology.'

'So?'

'So we wanted Tavener back. We arranged to kidnap him and smuggle him out. Unfortunately Russian intelligence beat us at the game. We got Tavener all right, but he's been given some drug which has virtually sealed off his mind. With some difficulty we're keeping him alive. But he's unconscious, and'll probably remain so until he dies. And there's a twenty year leap in power technology locked up in his brain.'

'Which is hard luck, but I don't see how I can help.'

'You can help a great deal. There's an experimental technique called mind-jault, which in theory could enable the information to be extracted from Tavener's mind without his conscious participation. We want you to get that information for us.'

'Naturally I refuse.'

The big American shifted awkwardly on his chair. 'You can't refuse, Martin. We're not giving you the option. That's why Cassius was brought in. With or without your consent, you're going to go through with it. I can only advise you not to resist. There's too much at stake to let niceties stand in the way.'

'Is that a threat?'

'Hell, yes! We aren't playing games here. This is for real.'

The telephone rang on Major Miller's desk. He took up the handset, listened and winced.

'I'll have to ask you to wait outside for a moment. There's a right rumpus going on upstairs. If I don't separate the combatants, there'll probably be bloodshed. And we all know whose blood it won't be.' He glanced ruefully at the ceiling. 'I won't keep you longer than I need.'

Sawyer and Haven went back into the hall. Although the American appeared ponderous and slow, Sawyer was in no doubt that if he attempted to make a run for the door, his friendly guardian would reach the portals first. He had the feeling that Haven would have vastly preferred to be elsewhere and otherwise engaged, but it was obvious that the man had a job to do, and was highly competent to do it.

'Is that Sawyer?' Some ten minutes later a woman in her early thirties, dressed in a white surgical coat, came down the stairs and crossed the hall. The relative youthfulness of her face was contrasted by her hair, which was going prematurely white. Her eyes were curiously bright and penetrating. Underneath the clinical detachment of her appraisal, Sawyer thought he could detect the bright nail-head of a more personal interest. She regarded him searchingly for many seconds.

'He doesn't look very intelligent,' was her final disparaging summary. 'If you cretins have bungled this one, I'll skin the lot of you.'

Two

SAWYER found his mouth had opened as if to start a protest against this unwarranted denigration. Finding nothing to say, he closed his mouth again and fell to wondering why the woman had made such a great impression on him.

'Who was that?' he asked Haven, as the white-coated figure went into the office.

'That was Cassius—Doctor Andrea Cass to the outside world.' The big American had tensed when she appeared. Now he was relaxing out of some extreme of emotion—was it fear or anxiety?—and turning the nervous energy into a slightly forced smile. 'You know, Martin, she took quite an interest in you. I think you made a hit there.'

'You could've fooled me.'

'But then you don't know Cassius like we do. Underneath that clinical exterior beats a heart of purest cold. She's unique, is Cassius. When they made her, they broke the mould. Cal Tech acquired the pieces for their cryogenics lab. Nearest they ever came to absolute zero.'

'That I can believe.'

'Then there's something else you'd better believe. You're going to get a glimpse of a part of life usually kept in the shade. Cassius is the world's top adviser on persuasion techniques—that's brainwashing and torture science to you. Her clients are many apparently benign governments, yours among them. Uneasy consciences in high places give her some extremely formidable friends—most of them above the law. For your own sake, keep in line. You can't expect to win against people like her.'

'I wasn't thinking of trying. I'm a natural-born coward. Even my yellow streak's got yellow streaks on it. All I want is out.'

'Well, you won't get out until Cassius gets what she wants. So don't do anything ridiculous, like trying to escape. Firstly, you wouldn't make it. Secondly, you'd sure as hell regret trying. Remember, nobody's really concerned with what happens to you.'

'I'm concerned,' said Sawyer, morosely. 'How'd I get involved in this nightmare, anyway?'

'You've the distinction of having been Alec Tavener's closest friend for many years. For some reason that's important to them.'

'I still can't see why. What's the angle?'

'Martin, I don't know, and I don't even want to know. I stopped being curious about the time I first started working with Cassius. Not knowing, is about the only way I get to sleep nights. She learnt her trade in Korea, and polished it in

Viet Nam. Some of the things I've seen that hell-bitch do wake even me up crying for my mother.'

Major Miller came down the stairs looking dishevelled and more than a little disturbed. Whatever was happening behind the scenes had obviously got beyond his control. His mood was chastened, and he had the air of a man forced to accept an unacceptable compromise. Sawyer reflected he had seldom seen a man more ill-used by circumstance.

'Doctor Sawyer—Doctor Woulfe, whose apparatus we'll be using, will explain to you the principles of mind-jant. Because of the technicalities and the political climate, the explanation will be necessarily brief. In the experiments which follow, Woulfe will now be acting as adviser. The actual operation will be under the control of our American colleagues.'

'I take it that Cassius wins again,' said Sawyer quietly to Haven.

'It never goes any other way,' said the American, carefully, as he shepherded Sawyer back into Miller's office. 'Bear that in mind, boy, when you get to the point where you feel like spitting in her eye.'

Woulfe, his professional calm and composure shattered by exposure to forces wilder than he had encountered in any classic Freudian psyche, looked like a man recently woken into the midst of a disaster. His naturally white and silken skin was covered by a film of perspiration, which, reflecting the artificial blue of the fluorescent lamps, reminded Sawyer of the scales of a putrefying fish. It said a great deal for the man's equilibrium that when he began to speak, his habitual lecture manner returned even though his bow tie was awry and his cuff-links dangled unfastened from his cuffs. He made a point of not looking directly at Cassius, who sat alone with a critical expression and watched him as if he were a mouse on which she intended to pounce.

'Doctor Sawyer—to give you some idea of what's going to happen here, I'm going to tell you briefly about the technique called mind-jant. There are disagreements about how much you need be told, but you're going to take part in the deepest mind probe ever attempted. If you're to

handle what you find there, you'll need at least an elementary knowledge of what it's all about.'

'Speed it up, you old fool!' said Cassius. 'We don't have all week.'

Woulfe ignored her. 'The best way of explaining mind-jant is to go back to fundamentals. When attempting to understand learning processes in infants, it's convenient to think in terms of perceptual models. One can surmise that an infant on first exploring the physical world, builds in his mind a perceptual model which is the analog of what he encounters. This model he modifies and refines by experience until it becomes a useful working approximation of reality. It's as if the brain came to contain a model of the part of the world in which its possessor lives.'

Sawyer nodded. 'I'm with you that far. But I don't see...'

'You don't see its relevance.' Woulfe stopped and mopped his brow. 'The relevance is this: when we started to look closely at perceptual models, we found they weren't just a descriptive convenience—they quite literally exist. Nor are they confined to infancy. We all carry models of our personal worlds around inside our brains.'

'I'm not too clear what you mean by "model".'

'The information's coded by the mind in a complex multi-access store which we don't pretend to understand. But the concepts forming the model are related to each other in such a way that for all practical purposes we're dealing with a three-dimensional replica. These are the streets through which imagination roams, the territories of dream and nightmare, and the source of all recognition. Faults in the model are characterised by paramnesia, and loss of access to the model results in amnesia. But the key to it all is the cognicenter.'

'What's that?' asked Sawyer.

'It's a term we use to denote the point of consciousness which inhabits the model in the same way that "self" inhabits the world at large. It's normally present in the model at the analog point corresponding to the presence of the person in the outside world. Such a coincidence is the condition of full awareness. Sometimes the cognicenter wan-

ders off into another part of the model, thus producing a lack of concentration and a division of the attention. At such times the brain is literally trying to process the information obtained from two non-congruent worlds.'

'But surely the conscious brain doesn't accept both inputs as being of equal value?'

'Normally it differentiates between them—but the division's not as clear-cut as you'd think. It's remarkable how frequently during waking hours our actions are directed by the model and the cognicenter rather than by actual perception. The motorist who didn't "see" the pedestrian may be speaking the literal truth—the pedestrian wasn't present on the model street down which he was driving at the time. And in darkness, fog or certain types of illness, it's likely to be the cognicenter rather than the perception to which the conscious mind refers for direction.'

'You're wasting time, Woulfe,' said Cassius, becoming angry. 'Come to the point or drop it altogether.'

'The point comes now,' said Woulfe, stiffly. 'We succeeded in defining what the cognicenter was. It's the mutual intercept point of seven different rhythms in the brain, some of which are characteristics of the standard EEG waves. Progression of the cognicenter through the model is achieved by subtle adjustments of phase relationships.'

'Does he really need to know this much?' said Cassius.

'For what you're proposing, Cassius, he needs five years preparation. That he's followed me so far in ten minutes is a reflection of a mind of outstanding ability.'

'I'm already revising my estimate of Doctor Sawyer. It's now my impression that too much information is even more dangerous than too little.'

'Then I can't agree with you.' Woulfe's equilibrium cracked ever so slightly. 'Doctor Sawyer, you can think of the cognicenter as a point of heightened activity in the brain. The cells of the model are themselves discharged by the presence of the cognicenter, and this discharge forms the output from the system. Since the cognicenter is itself a phase phenomenon, it's amenable to duplication or control by certain electrical simulation techniques.'

Sawyer sat up. 'If I read you right, you're saying that the cognicenter can be artificially manipulated from outside the skull?'

'I'm saying a lot more than that. We can create our own cognicenter, manipulate it through the model, collect the resulting pattern of discharges, and display them for viewing by a second party. In short, we can take a trip through a man's mind and see what his world looks like from the inside.'

'That's fantastic!' said Sawyer. 'I'd no idea anything like that was possible.'

'It's been possible for some time. We developed it as a diagnostic technique, especially for schizophrenia, where there's evidence that the natural cognicenter is fragmented or diffuse. Unfortunately the powers that be—he glanced at Cassius accusingly—'decided that the ability to inspect the mind from inside was too valuable to be wasted on mental health. They put it under wraps as a potential means of security screening. I'm happy to record it's been an abject failure in this application.'

'Abject failure?'

'An individual's perception is filtered through a set of screens reflecting the overtones of emotional experience, education, prejudice, suggestibility and similar factors, which modify and distort the picture before it's recorded in the model. Thus every person's inner world is different and unique. It takes a very close match of sympathies, experience and understanding, and a great deal of personal knowledge, before a "viewer" can hope to gain anything more than a fleeting and obscure set of images. A psychotherapist might achieve access to his patient after six months of contact and willing comprehension. It's no use at all for screening somebody who just jumped off a boat.'

'So where does this place me?'

'Right here, Doctor Sawyer!' Cassius had advanced and was intent on taking control of the conversation. 'You're Tavener's best friend. You went to college with him, and you've worked with him on the Perseus project. He was a frequent guest at your house until he went abroad. If any man can understand Tavener's mind, it's you. Just as im-

portant, you're qualified in the same field, so you can understand the technical content of whatever you find. So you're going to take a jaunt into Tavener's mind, and you're going to recover the details of the work he was doing in Russia.'

'I don't fancy the idea of entering anyone's mind, least of all Alec's.'

'I don't care what the hell you fancy.' She rounded on him instantly. There lurked something like a tiger, bright behind her eyes. 'I'm not asking you, Doctor Sawyer—I'm telling you. And sure as hell you'd better co-operate. This operation's outside the scope of your mamby-pamby laws, so don't think you've still got any legal rights. If you displease me, I'll destroy you. So if you value your life and health, do exactly as I tell you, and neither more nor less.'

'That sounds like a convincing argument.' Sawyer's voice was slightly ragged with emotion. 'I don't appear to have much option.'

'You don't have *any* option. But I'll be watching you very closely, Doctor Sawyer. Because you've the look of a man who still thinks he can win.'

THREE

'THERE you are, Martin!' said Haven. 'Does that answer most of your questions?'

'Only to raise a whole deal more. There's no love lost between Woulfe and Cassius, is there?'

'Woulfe's being a damned fool. At the moment he's indispensable, because he's the only one with sufficient knowledge to make the jaunt work properly. But as soon as Cassius can find a competent replacement, Woulfe's a dead pigeon. Nobody bucks Cassius and gets away with it.'

'I thought the old fellow was being very brave.'

'He's a damned idealist. He's convinced that mental health is more important than political stability.'

'If Cassius is an example of the price we pay for stability, then I'd say he was unarguably right. If he was allowed to succeed in his job, we probably wouldn't need Cassius in the

first place. In fact, there wouldn't even be a vindictive bitch like Cassius.'

'Which piece of naïvety shows you've never even thought about the subject.' Haven was disgusted. 'Honestly, Martin, you scientists worry me. You spend so long with your head in your books you've not the remotest idea what motivates people.'

'And you political guardians worry me. Your approach to politics is an exact parallel to the Spanish Inquisition. And think how that looks on the pages of the history books.'

'They may have had Torquemada, but they didn't have Cassius. If they had, those history books could well have been written in Latin. Think on that one, Martin. It's the thing that succeeds which gets taught as being right. If you fail, history marks you down as the bad guy. Why? Because it's the successful who get to write the books on history.'

'Where's Alec Tavener now? Is he here?'

'He's in a special intensive-care unit upstairs.'

'Can I see him?'

'Through a window, of course. But what's to see? I guess his nose shows over the sheets, but that's about it.'

'I'd like to see him, anyway.'

'Be my guest!' The big American indicated for Sawyer to go before him up the stairs. He glanced at his watch. 'We've got about an hour before they're ready to start you through the jaunt. You'd be better advised to try and get some rest.'

'Rest!' Sawyer pretended to be aghast. 'There's one thing nobody around here seems to have taken into account. Alec Tavener's one hell of a physicist. He plays physics like he plays the rest of life—full tilt at the Devil, and the last one pays for the drinks. If I don't seem too enthusiastic about this jaunt, it's partly because I've a rough idea what the world of Alec Tavener is like.'

He had imagined a hospital suite upstairs, but no smell of medicaments was present. Wonderingly he preceded Haven to the top floor and was then directed up a flight of small stairs which opened out on to a flat area of roof. Here the

mystery was explained. Three prefabricated cabins forming a sterile theatre and auxiliary rooms had been positioned on the roof, presumably by means of a helicopter. Sawyer was not permitted to enter the unit, but he was allowed to stand in the chill Highland air and peer through the sealed cabin window.

There was no way of knowing whether the covered figure on the elaborate theatre table was or was not Alec Tavener. The proportions tended to confirm that it was. The medical equipment was comprehensive and very expensive. It was obvious that no expense was being spared to keep the figure on the table alive. So strongly did this contrast with Cassius's low regard for the value of human life, that Sawyer winced at the thought. The big American was watching the emotions on his face.

'What's eating you now, Martin?'

'All that equipment—not to preserve a man, but to preserve something he knows. How twisted can your values get? When Cassius has what she wants, I suppose they'll let him die?'

'He'd have died a long while ago if he hadn't been in there. What's the use of preserving a living corpse? No use making yourself sick over that.'

'I suppose not. It's just that the principle makes me feel cold in my guts.'

'We'd better go down again,' said Haven. 'They'll be looking for you soon. You're to have your head shaved before they fit the helmet.'

'Is that necessary?'

There was a cynical smile on Haven's face. 'Possibly not. If I had to guess, I'd say that Cassius was starting to rub little pieces off you, to see how far she can go before you bleed.'

Sawyer turned unhappily to follow the American back down the stairs. It was just past dawn on a damp and cheerless morning. Beyond the cabins on the roof he could see the length of what appeared to be an abandoned airstrip. The ruins of a hanger stood dark at one end; a pole with tatters of an ancient wind-sock stood forlornly at one edge; and beyond this rose a rockstrewn moor rising up to meet

the distant range of hills. If he had thought of escaping, the prospect of being the quarry in an exhausting manhunt across those moors was the last thing that would tempt him to try.

The equipment, which had been driven out to the centre of the airstrip on the back of the land-rover, appeared at first to be a kind of diving apparatus. On closer examination, the helmet, though complex, was in no way airtight, and the body packs were heavy with electronic instruments and not cylinders of air. Sawyer looked at the apparatus warily, then back to Cassius. He was acutely conscious of his shaven head, and apprehensive about what was going to be done to him. Cassius's purposeful attitude left him in no doubt that his role was that of experimental animal, and that his subjective feelings and private sufferings were quite irrelevant. The only concession was that she answered his unasked question about the peculiarity of the locale.

'Why out here, Doctor Sawyer? For the sake of reality we're using a computer-generated three-dimensional simulation technique. When you "walk" through Tavener's model, you'll actually walk out here. The transducers and picture tubes in the helmet will give you all the visual and sensory information derived from the model. Your own position and attitude will be transmitted back to the computer, which will use the information to control the position of the artificial cognicenter in the model. While you physically move in real-space, your mental impressions will be that of a journey through Tavener's model.'

As the technicians prepared the cumbersome equipment on the truck, Sawyer looked about him. The airstrip and the surrounding grassland were featureless and forlorn. At the end of the broken tarmac the ruined hangar, black and with a decaying outline like a rotting tooth, seemed somehow a fitting symbol of the desolate and macabre mood of the day. The dark outline of the hills beyond seemed to emphasise that this was a place for shades and bad intent. Even the birds were silent and still.

Uncomfortable though the helmet appeared, its application was even worse. The actual fitting over his head filled

Sawyer with a nausea and a sudden panic which caused him to try and draw out of it again. An excruciating pain in his left arm told him that Cassius's steadying fingers were causing a nerve pain which he could not endure for long. He used the pain to overcome the revulsion he felt for the helmet, knowing that rebellion was useless and that acquiescence was the only route to survival. Nevertheless he called her a bitch under his breath and managed to tread heavily on her instep under the pretext that with the helmet in place he was effectively blind. A long hiatus followed, but her fingers were withdrawn.

The leather helmet proved hot and heavy, and was strapped he thought needlessly tight at the back of his head. Cold studs of metal covered with a conducting jelly made uncomfortable contact with his shorn scalp, and in place of an eyepiece or vizor, some sort of electronic optical system, currently not functioning, shut out all vision except for a tiny suggestion of light which scattered from the surface of his still exposed nose. Stout headphones on the helmet were cushioned around his ears, cutting off almost all the incidental sounds which had been about him. A strong strap under his jaw pinched his skin as it was tightened. Thus hooded and effectively prevented from perceiving his immediate environment, he felt terribly vulnerable and very much afraid.

His vulnerability was emphasised immediately. Although the morning was damp and chill he felt his jacket being removed from his shoulders and his shirt and vest being cut away with the cold steel of a knife. He tried to protest, but the microphone chamber around his mouth probably made his comments locally inaudible. Nevertheless, as if to remind him that his was supposed to be the passive role, somebody knocked him to the ground. He bruised his elbow, and grazed his shoulder on the tarmac, but the lesson went home. Thereafter he stood patiently while they fitted the tight harness around his chest and shoulders and added the weighty electronic packs.

Cassius's voice broke through clearly on the headphones. 'How're you doing, Doctor Sawyer?' There was a trace of mockery in her voice.

'The harness and blinkers fit fine. But I think you forgot the cart.'

'I never forget important details, Doctor Sawyer. But keep the sense of humour. You'll maybe find you need it. Are you ready to start?'

'Dressed like this, I don't have any other damn place to go.'

'Then stand quite still until I get back to the control truck. You'll be told when to proceed.'

'Whatever you say ... Andrea.'

'Take care, Doctor Sawyer! You're in no position to be impertinent.'

'Do you prefer being called Cassius?'

'Just keep your mind on the job. What I'm called is irrelevant.'

'Not to me, it isn't.'

'I've not quite got the measure of you yet, Doctor Sawyer. But I think you underestimate the seriousness of your position.'

'But I've one slight advantage. I do have the measure of you. You're a perfect bitch, Andrea!'

Suddenly she laughed. 'Very well, Martin! If you wish to play this out on a personal level, I'll find it the more enjoyable. It's going to be a pleasure, working on you.'

She cut the connection, presumably while the land-rover drove her back to the control truck. There was a crackle, and Tony Haven's voice came through on another channel.

'You're a bloody fool, Martin! Taking Cassius on like that. As a neutral test subject, you stood a fair chance of getting out of this undamaged. But if she regards you as a toy ...'

'She threw down the challenge the first moment we met. All I did was toss it back.'

'But why the hell take the risk?'

'Look, Tony, I didn't ask to be included in this. But if I'm doing the batting, I intend doing it my way.'

'Suit yourself,' said Haven. 'But I hope you know the name of the game.'

There was silence then for a long period. Despite the fact

that much of his torso was bare, the straps and the harness served to mitigate some of the morning's chill. Though rendered blind by the helmet, his fingers explored the various clips and buckles of the equipment. He also found the multi-pole cable connectors feeding the systems to his helmet, and familiarised himself with the twist-lock releases on the couplings. He estimated he could break all the line connections inside ten seconds, and be entirely free of the helmet and harness in about three quarters of a minute. It might never be necessary, but it was as well to be prepared.

'If you're thinking of escape, Martin, forget it.' Cassius's critical voice returned to the headphones. 'There's no way. But if you feel like trying it, I'll enjoy stopping you.'

'Let's forget the commercials and get on with the program.'

'Just coming on-line. We don't know exactly where you'll break into Tavener's model, or what time-depth you'll encounter. This first jaunt will be to get you some field experience, and give you a chance to get orientated.'

Sawyer shivered suddenly as a cold wind sought his midriff.

'The field experience, I'm already having. I don't rate it very highly. Even my goose-pimples are growing goose-pimples.'

'I hope you aren't weakening, Martin. Because I've scarcely started on you yet.'

There was a sudden light before his eyes, and a rushing sound in his ears. Neither sight nor sound was coherent, and he stood dumbfounded, wondering if this was to be the continuing content of the experience.

'Are you receiving anything, Martin?' Cassius's voice came sharply impressed over the background.

'A sort of pink noise and a lot of multi-spectral flashes. If this is the best you can do, we'd best pack up and go home.'

'You should get so lucky! We're just bringing you into synchronisation. Stand by for action.'

The impressions changed abruptly. Sawyer's reaction was a cry of disbelief. He was no longer standing on a Highland airstrip. Instead he was on the pavement of a London street he vaguely knew. If he consciously willed it, he could make

himself aware of the helmet on his head and the weight of the equipment packs and the cold chill around his stomach: but these impressions seemed illusory and unreal compared with the immediacy and sense of presence he felt. The overwhelming realism of the scene compelled belief in its existence. Like it or not, he had become an inhabitant in the model world of Alec Tavener.

FOUR

'BREAKTHROUGH?' asked Cassius's voice, out of nowhere.

'I'm here, if that's what you mean.'

'Fidelity good?'

'The best. I'm more here than I would be if I were here in actuality, if you see what I mean.'

'Right, Martin! We're going to leave you alone for a while—give you the chance to get used to the situation. The computer will check your movements on the field and track you through the model, so you should find movement's no problem. If you run into something you can't handle, yell, and we'll bring you out.'

Experimentally, Sawyer looked around him. Although he knew that his vision was coming from two miniature television picture tubes in his helmet, it was virtually impossible to believe that the scene around him was not real and that he was not seeing it directly with his own eyes. When he turned his head there was a slight delay before the mechanism sensed the movement and adjusted the image accordingly, but this was tolerable and something to which he found he could easily adjust.

He tried walking. Again there was a fractional hesitation in the response, which placed the image slightly out of phase with the movements of his feet, producing a peculiar rolling sensation akin to that of walking the deck of a slowly heaving ship. Intrigued, he paced a few steps up and down the road, feeling that he was walking on slabbed paving, yet knowing that in actuality all that he had beneath his feet was the broken tarmac of the abandoned airstrip. Careful exploration with his feet produced some-

thing of a shock, for his feet seemed actually to feel the presence of the ordered gaps in the paving. This made him aware that it was not only sight and sound which was being fed into his perception by the helmet. The electrodes on his head were feeding in a wide range of even subtler impressions.

His immediate speculation was about the material of which the model seemed to be made. He turned his attention to the nearest building. The definition was not good, showing that Alec Tavener had never looked at it properly, yet Sawyer's hands encountered a solid which had all the texture and response of old and dirty masonry. In this respect the model seemed as believable as the actual place, and to restore his link with reality he made his shoulders chafe against the straps of the equipment packs on his back. His final test was to attempt to walk through the wall. It stopped him as effectively as masonry should have done, while on the airstrip a cold wind bit into his midriff from the selfsame point of the compass, there being no barrier to stop it between himself and the distant hills.

'Having trouble, Martin?' Cassius's voice was sharp with curiosity.

'A dual reality—it takes a bit of getting used to.'

'You've achieved that? It's supposed to be no more than a theoretical possibility.'

'Just a knack,' said Sawyer, modestly. 'If I fell into a bed of roses I'd come out intimately covered with fertilizer.'

He heard the determined click as she closed her channel down, then he began to concentrate attention on his environment. Whereas at first glance it had appeared to be a normal street, a more objective inspection revealed an unreality which was both fascinating and shattering. Tavener obviously used this street purely as part of a route to somewhere else. It contained only the elements of observation essential to this fact, and some areas of the model were completely blank. Sawyer, whose knowledge of the district seemed marginally better, could in many cases visualize what the blanks should have contained; the model, however, remained obstinately uninformative.

Most of the shop windows contained nothing except a

few uncoloured, indefinable shapes. Some windows were brilliantly lit but contained in detail only a few items of expensive cameras and attractive coats in which Tavener had been interested. The impression was that the entire street was purely a façade, a fabrication akin to a film set, with none of the shop interiors having a depth of more than a couple of metres. The skyline, too, was particularly vague. Only one shop, with a display of particularly fine audio equipment, had a well-defined window display, and a door that opened to lead to a shop within. Not wishing to enter, Sawyer peered through the glass to find a similar fidelity in the display shelves and in the staff themselves.

Staff! Up to this point, Sawyer had thought in terms of an inanimate model, an analog stage-set in which shadowy dramas were played out. But people were as much a part of a man's environment as were bricks and mortar. This shop contained model staff in the same way that the real shop had contained staff. The models would presumably have no independent existence outside of the particular location in which they had been observed by Tavener. Their function would be to provide a memory match or comparison next time their creator returned to the same place. They would be absent, present, or changed, and thus would be the spring-source of the resultant observations. There was something unsettling in the idea of these human images permanently dwelling in a model hi-fi shop just in case Alec Tavener should one day drop in to renew a diamond stylus.

A further thought struck Sawyer as he moved away from the door. These living models would not be people as they were, but only Alec Tavener's interpretation of the people he met. This explained, perhaps, why the shopgirl had overtly large busts and thighs, while the manager was scarcely more than a thin, grey shadow. The use of the mind-jaunt technique in psychiatry was growing ever more clear to him, but now he felt a certain reluctance to continue into a more populated part of the model. As a ghost in a wasteland, he had felt a reasonable confidence, but as a traveller into the more dynamic, complex domains of Tavener-land he felt very ill-equipped.

The idea of a populated model puzzled him considerably, and he continued along the street wondering why only part of it was populated while the rest seemed uninhabited. It was obviously a question of relevance—whether the entry had been filed in the short-term, mid-term or long-term memory. Probably only the things that survived the mid to long-term memory transfer became parts of the model, while short-term images were rejected to keep the scene usefully uncluttered.

It was by looking for them deliberately that he became aware of the transients. These were fleeting, short-term images of all the cars, pedestrians and other moving objects which had filled the scene at any time in Tavener's experience, yet were too transitory to become part of the model proper. By deliberately focusing on them and carefully following their progress, Sawyer could catch the fleeting impression of a bus or a car or a walking shopper. There were hundreds upon thousands of these ill-perceived ghosts, a mighty throng of dynamic shadows which surged in the limbo around him, yet were still and quiet as soon as he relaxed his attention. Sawyer shrugged them from his perception, and returned the street to the deserted quiet of a ghost town.

He continued down the street, recognising that he, himself, normally turned right at the next corner on his way to the station. To his surprise, the right hand turning proved to be a foreshortened backdrop of the road, with no actual means of access. Apparently Tavener occasionally glanced in that direction, but had never turned down it, and therefore the street had no existence as far as the model was concerned. Conversely, by continuing straight ahead, Sawyer was entering territory with which he himself was unfamiliar. This would be entirely Tavener-land, and all its artifacts and population would bear the interpretation that Tavener had impressed upon them. Already as he slipped into the end of the street he became aware of strange shifts of emphasis and a sense of alienness and a disquiet at trespassing in somebody else's world.

The first thing which became apparent was Tavener's long-term familiarity with this part of the district. In

several instances, new and shiny shopfronts had shadowy veils behind them of places which had been rebuilt, with the ghosts of the old still showing through the new. The people in the shops and stores were more clearly defined, and all save a few shops had the depth which indicated Tavener's knowledge of their interiors. Such detailed familiarity struck Sawyer as curious, because from his certain knowledge Alec had never lived in the district. However a pied-a-terre or the establishment of a mistress was a distinct possibility.

The second factor of which Sawyer became aware was a peculiar shading of the emphasis which seemed to favour some areas and to shun others; as though there were places where Tavener delighted to tread, areas which were neutral, and sections shrouded in a darkness which hinted at unpleasant experiences and of things better forgotten or at least not dwelt upon. The impression was that even in maturity Alec Tavener had still continued to live a life of more than usual depth and activity, and had continued to feel joy and love and hate and fear in a way more reminiscent of the keen emotions of the young.

'Well, Martin? What's the matter now?'

Cassius must have been watching his cautious movements across the field.

'I'm getting in deep, Andrea. Treading where even Alec might not care for me to go.'

'You'll be going a whole lot deeper yet. Keep moving, Martin. Get all the experience you can. You'll likely have need of it before you're through.'

It was at the next corner that Sawyer came across the paper-seller. Until this time he had been under the impression that the sky was light. Now suddenly he was in an interminable twilight which was presumably a compound of countless summer and winter evenings. The paper-seller sat forlornly at his box against a wall, directly beneath a street lamp, selling papers to transient ghosts who flitted from the scene bearing ephemeral news-sheets like a procession of news-hungry shades. There was nothing transient about the news-seller, however. His round and very red face and paucity of pure white locks of hair proclaimed him as

a local character—a person one always expected to meet on this corner.

More amazingly, as Sawyer approached, the old fellow looked towards him with every sign of recognition. The transients became even less substantial.

'Evening, Professor Tav'ner! Not one of your reg'lar nights, is it?'

Surprised, Sawyer took the offered paper, and felt towards his pocket for change. An equipment pack on his hip should have prevented him from getting into his trouser pocket. However, his hand came back with a coin in it. He need not have bothered. The old paper-seller appeared to have forgotten him, and had returned to serving the transient ghosts.

'Andrea!'

'Yes?'

'Let me speak to Woulfe.'

'Woulfe here—what's on your mind, Doctor Sawyer?'

'This artificial cognicenter I'm driving—should it evoke a response from the inhabitants of the model?'

'Nobody ever got that deeply in before. In theory I suppose it must. The presence of a cognicenter is the thing which causes the model to discharge. It should evoke some fairly typical reactions. But without any outside perception to support the reaction, I'd not expect you to be able to produce a substantial dialogue.'

'That's roughly what I found. An old fellow recognised me as Tavener, then forgot I existed in a couple of seconds.'

'An important observation. I'd like you to confirm that elsewhere if you get the chance.'

Curious now, Sawyer tried to look down and around to see if he could find out what the cognicenter might look like to the inhabitants of the model. Limitations of the mechanics of the optics prevented the success of such a manoeuvre, and he began to imagine himself purely as an optical focal point, a kind of insubstantial bubble lens. The idea was not satisfactory, so he sought an unlit shop window to see if he could see a reflection. The image which came back was that of Alec Tavener, probably the man's

own idealized view of himself, with all his engaging liveliness and ugliness. Something about the image was disturbing. For one thing, it moved while he remained still. Sawyer could not determine why, so he forgot about it and turned his attention on the street ahead.

Here it was dark. For some peculiar reason this seemed to be the place of night, with a relatively low leavening of daylight which only just broke the absolute blackness of the sky overhead. Artificial lights were numerous: they shone from tall lamp standards, were coloured by curtains, and gleamed invitingly from the windows of bars—and there was a particularly coloured collection of lights which illuminated the entrance to a dance-hall and dive which was the type of place Sawyer himself would not have had the temerity to enter. Here the street was thronged with people, not transients such as had inhabited the earlier approaches, but well-drawn, well-defined characters who obviously had some relevance to the world of Alec Tavener. More strictly they were caricatures, for each carried some distinguishing peculiarity which had been endowed by Tavener's imagination. It was mainly the physical attributes of the women which were subject to gross exaggeration.

Experimentally, Sawyer entered a bar. The barman turned to him immediately, a smile of recognition on his face.

'Pint of bitter,' said Sawyer. The experiment was to determine if his own voice could be heard.

'Changed your drink, then, Prof?' The slight surprise on the man's face was soon lost in a cloud of forgetfulness. He placed a half-filled glass upon the counter and went about his business. The experiment was over. As Woulfe had surmised, the dialogue could not be extended. The cognicenter which was Sawyer was forgotten as soon as the elements of the model had made their relevant discharge.

Sawyer eyed the glass on the counter thirstily, touched it, and felt the coolness of the glass under his fingers. He raised it towards his lips, expecting it to meet the mouthpiece of the helmet. No such sensation came, and he drank gratefully, and would have ordered another except that his exis-

tence had been forgotten. No matter how he called, nobody came or even appeared to notice he was there.

Feeling rather like the invisible man, Sawyer left the bar, wondering if it was theoretically possible to sustain himself on imaginary food and drink. He had no doubt that he had consumed half a pint of bitter, just as he had no doubt that the doors and walls he encountered felt as real as their actual counterparts. The fact that he knew for certain that none of these things existed in reality in no way lessened the subjective impact of the impressions.

Outside in the street again, he had a curious feeling that he was being followed. At first he put the impression down to the presence of numerous transients, but shortly he became convinced of a half-formed something which lurked constantly just out of his range of vision. He wondered if it could be some reflection of himself, a ringing of the biological pulses which determined the position of his cog-ni-center. Whatever it was, it worried him, but there was no means by which he could determine its nature. He therefore decided to ignore it, and continue with his exploration.

Some unexplained shading in the emphasis took him compulsively around the corner to where a block of apartments rose high against the false sky. Someone in whom Tavener had been interested must have lived within, if he could judge by the clarity with which the detail had been recorded. The preferred route, however, seemed to be not in through the main entrance but rather by a path which led to a second door at the side. Intrigued, Sawyer followed the emphasis, noting as he did so the various shades of mis-giving with which the way was lined. Whatever pattern of relationship Alec had found within, it also had its less welcome aspects.

The side door was unlocked. Inside was a corridor lush with carpets and illuminated with expensive lamps. Apart from the elevator there were only three doors leading from the corridor, and one of these was obviously of special significance. Sawyer knocked.

'What the hell?' An irate female voice sounded close to the panel, and then the door was flung open. Sawyer found

himself looking into the startled eyes of a woman whose face was vaguely familiar, although he could not place it. Her hair was dishevelled, and her eyes were full of sleep, but otherwise she was a creature of outstanding beauty. Curiously, though, the model was completely factual, with none of Tavener's wishful exaggerations.

'Alec! I wasn't expecting you. But no matter—come in.'

FIVE

HER tone was one of surprise rather than pleasure. Sawyer passed her, noting as he did so that she immediately forgot his presence. The pattern did not seem to fit convincingly with what he knew of Tavener and, hoping for some further information, he made a tour of inspection. The apartment was furnished luxuriously, way beyond the style to which even Alec Tavener might aspire. Certainly Alec was not supporting this establishment, even though he was a welcome guest. While he tried to solve the mystery the occupant dropped back on to a couch and bit her nails, her brow wrinkled as if something vital had escaped her memory.

The lounge and the kitchen revealed nothing of interest, and neither did the bedroom. Alec may have been a visitor, but he was certainly not a resident. The study seemed similarly unrevealing. Only when he turned to leave the study did he stop, suddenly stunned by something impossible written large in black crayon right across the wall. For a long while he stared at the legend in frank disbelief. It was not until he had scraped some of the crayon off with his nail that he began to accept it as anything more than a strange hallucination. The message was real—as real as anything else in these halls of the mind.

It read:

MARTIN—

YOU OLD HERMIT CRAB—
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO—IS
SURVIVE!

There was no signature. None was necessary. The phrasing and the writing were unmistakably those of Alec Tavener.

Fazed, and still only half believing, he turned and made his way out of the study. The woman on the couch noted him with curiosity.

'Alec, I thought you'd gone...' Then she forgot about him immediately, and he let himself out of the door.

He encountered the unwanted shadow again in the corridor. For some reason, it had not followed him into the apartment. Now its presence fretted him. He wanted time to explain to himself how Tavener could have left a message for him deep inside his own mind. In a moment of distraction he turned left outside the door when he should have turned right, and recoiled with shock when he encountered an invisible barrier halfway down the corridor.

'Steady, Martin!' The barrier was an invisible arm, and the voice was Haven's. 'We don't want you ripped to pieces on the wire.'

After a long delay, a hideous blackness came as the world of Alec Tavener was squashed by a vast black wing. Then fingers were at the back of his helmet helping to remove it. A sudden rush of daylight, and he reeled with the shock of reorientation as he found himself back on the edge of the air-strip only a metre away from its rustily barbed perimeter.

By some quirk of nature the sun had struggled through the Autumn and the morning had become pleasantly warm. Haven and one of the technicians stood close to him with the land-rover, and the American placed a blanket round his shoulders as soon as the equipment packs had been removed.

'How'd you feel, Martin?'

'Like death revived. As a nightmare, this exercise has a great deal going for it. As a way of life, it leaves a lot to be desired.'

'Don't let it get too deep under your skin, boy. That was only a trial skirmish. The real job comes later. Cassius wants to debrief you now, but we'll find you some food and

a hot bath if there's time. And Martin, for your own sake don't get too smart with Cassius.'

'You already said that.'

'This time I really mean it. You're way out of your depth. She doesn't have to care how much or how little she leaves of a man after she's finished with him. You just concentrate on survival and hope like hell you manage to achieve it.'

'Well, Martin?'

Cassius was interested, and also a little amused at his discomfort. She had not allowed him to retain his blanket, so that he had to stand before her half naked, and with the marks made by the heavy equipment harness still apparent in his flesh. With his head shaven, he felt curiously like an imbecile dredged out of some ancient snake-pit. By way of contrast, Cassius was clean and crisp and poised, a model of clinical efficiency. She had the psychological advantage, and made sure that Sawyer was fully aware of it.

His own responses were conditioned by the memory of Tavener's impossible message that the most important thing he could do was survive. Co-operation with Cassius was a prime requisite for survival, so he put on his most charming professional smile and assumed an air of ease that he did not feel.

'Yes, Andrea? You had some questions?'

She looked at him speculatively, not taken in by his composure.

'Woulfe tells me that your integration into Tavener's mind was as near perfect as has ever been achieved. You're a natural for the job. Probably because you've only a weak and plastic character of your own.'

'You could have a point there,' said Sawyer, refusing to be baited.

'I want you to describe in detail everything that happened on the jaunt.'

Sawyer nodded and waited till she had started the recorder, then gave her the story as he remembered it. The only thing he omitted was the finding of Alec's message written upon the wall. While he was telling the story,

Woulfe came in, looked solicitously at his predicament, then sat at the table and listened.

'Is that all?' asked Cassius, when Sawyer had finished.

'As I said, I was halfway down the hall when Tony Haven stopped me because I was too close to the wire.'

Cassius looked back over her notes. 'This is very encouraging, Martin. If you can hold that degree of integration through the final part of the job, we shall probably get what we're after.'

'I was worried by that shadow or reflection following me around. Is it possible there was another cognicenter in there with me?' This query was directed at Woulfe.

Woulfe started to reply, then stopped, his eyes fixed on Cassius.

'It's not possible,' he said, finally. 'Tavener's own cognicenter barely exists. It must have been an artifact introduced by our own equipment.' Something about his expression showed a complete lack of conviction.

'Get out, you old fool!' said Cassius. 'And send Haven in with some London maps. I want to see exactly where this jaunt took us.'

Woulfe straightened and went out. His face told almost nothing of the thoughts in his mind. Shortly the big American came in and spread some large-scale maps over the table.

'Now, Martin,' said Cassius, 'identify the point where you started into the model.'

Sawyer consulted the sheets carefully. 'Right about here—facing east.'

Cassius drew a line across the map with a pencil. 'Then the apartment you entered would have been about here.'

'That would be it. It lay back a little from the road.'

'Good! We can use those points to start calculating our bearings through the model. It'll take about three hours computer work to give us a trial fix. Then you can go in and verify it. And Martin...'

'Yes?'

'I'm suspicious of your co-operation. It strikes me as an act.'

'If it is, I could have fooled me.'

'You may think you've something up your sleeve. In the first place, it's unlikely. In the second place, it won't do you any good. For the moment I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. But get out of line and I'll do you a mischief you'll carry to your grave.'

'I love you, too, Andrea.'

Her incredulous amusement turned to irritation. 'Get him out of here, Tony, before I'm tempted to start on him with my bare hands.'

Haven's warning nod encouraged Sawyer to make for the door. The American followed him out.

'You never learn, do you, Martin,' he said, sadly.

'What did I do? I co-operated right down the line, and she wound up suspecting I was putting on an act.'

'If Cassius thought it was an act, then it was an act. She has an instinct for such things. I've never known her to be wrong. I just hope for your sake she doesn't decide to find out why you were acting.'

'But I wasn't. I've nothing to hide. I was picked up off the streets, remember?' He turned to Haven for confirmation, and was baffled to see a trace of amusement on the big American's face. 'I don't see what's so funny?'

'You would if you'd worked with Cassius as long as I have. There'd be a beautiful irony if this proved to be the one project which was too hot even for her to handle.'

'Are we ready, Martin?'

This time Cassius had not interfered with the fact that he was wearing a shirt. It was one of Tony Haven's, and many sizes too large. He looked and felt ridiculous in it, but it protected his skin from chafing by the harness and served to mitigate most of the chill.

'As ready as I'll ever be.'

'Then you know what to look for. We're attempting to pick up the model point corresponding to Tavener's time in Russia. We can't be too precise on location, so you'll have to establish exactly where you are. We'll re-program you from there. We've an interpreter standing by in case the task exceeds your lamentable Russian.'

'I understand that. Shouldn't I be wearing furs or something?'

'An interesting point. But I doubt the necessity. If Tavener wasn't cold in Russia, then the model won't be cold. But if we do see ice forming on you, we'll come out with an ice pick and hack it off.'

'Thanks for a whole load of nothing.' Sawyer stood still under the darkness of the helmet and waited for the next phase of his torment to begin. Soon there was the kaleidoscope of lights before his eyes and the hideous rush in his ears as the induction process was started. Then the scene hardened and cleared and he stood amazed not by the difference of the scene but by its similarity.

'Andrea, something's gone wrong. This isn't Russia. This is London again.'

'What! I'll kill that old fool. Don't move, Martin. I've some sorting out to do.'

'Check!' While he waited, Sawyer surveyed his position. He was near the point to which he had previously walked, not far from the apartment block, and well inside Tavenerland. The street was deserted and even the busy transients seemed absent. Not only this, but the whole place had the appearance of having been abandoned for some considerable time. Now that he looked carefully he could see the windows were heavily grimed, and there were cobwebs spanning many of the doors. Dried leaves and paper rustled in the gutter, breaking a silence that was otherwise absolute. The hairs began to rise on the back of his neck. A London dead...

'Martin!' Cassius's voice was cuttingly dangerous. 'I'll string you up and draw your nerves out one by one if you're playing a game.'

'I never felt less like playing games. Your gear's got stuck in a groove. And a weird one, at that.'

'It isn't possible. We've just checked out the time-depth of the penetration, and it corresponds to the time that Tavener was in Russia.'

'I don't care where he was. I know where I am—and that's exactly where I was before. Only this time it's different.'

'Different?' She registered the query but did not stop to consider it. She cut the connection instead, and Sawyer was left trying to imagine the vituperance behind the scenes as Cassius roasted the technical crew responsible.

Having nothing better to do in the limbo of the model in which he found himself, Sawyer studied the scene more carefully. Everywhere there was evidence of advanced decay and neglect. It was as though the street had been abandoned for fifty years while the processes of ageing had continued. Paint hung in large curls from woodwork which was deeply splitting. Metal surrounds to shopfronts were heavily tarnished, and chromium plating had been virtually eased away from its base by the ravages of the rust beneath. Adventurous and delicate plant-shoots had exerted their subtle powers and lifted whole paving slabs upwards in their efforts to reach this pitiful semblance of daylight.

Sawyer became inwardly terrified. This was a scene which had never existed and which probably never would exist. How, therefore, had it become part of the model in Tavener's mind? Only if the model had been established through the twisted filters of madness could it assume this deserted and terrible aspect. Or was it somehow symbolic of an attitude of mind?

He thought he saw a flash of white back down the way he had come on his earlier jaunt, and he moved across the road to gain a better view. What he saw made him gasp with astonishment. At the corner, the old paper-seller still sat, his box now falling to pieces, dispensing faded papers to nobody at all. The man himself was untouched by time, his red face and snowy strands of hair looked exactly as they had before. The news-sheets as he touched them, however, broke into crumbles of yellowed dust.

Sawyer approached, curious as to whether or not he was seeing a ghost.

'Evening, Professor Tav'ner. Nice to see you back!'

The paper-seller handed Sawyer a newspaper which crushed alarmingly to dust as he attempted to take it. Sawyer backed away in haste, a new terror forming in his mind.

'Andrea.'

No answer.

'Andrea!'

'Yes, Martin? What the hell is it now?'

'Is Alec Tavener dead?'

Six

THE RAPIDITY with which the connection was cut was its own comment on the panic his question must have raised. Sawyer was not too convinced by his interpretation of the decay he found around him, but he was looking for any seed of logic in his surroundings. He did not think he was psychologically able to continue a journey through a dead man's head.

'No, he's not dead, Martin. His condition's unchanged. What gave you the idea?'

'This model. It's the same place, all right. But it's aged and deserted like the real place never could be.'

'It can't be the same place. You're in an entirely different part of the model.'

'Then it looks as if it's back to the drawing board for Woulfe. Are you going to fetch me out?'

'No, you stay there. There's something very peculiar about all this. When I find out who's responsible I'll give him such hell he'll pray to be allowed to die.'

A sudden sound in the model, the first he had heard save for the leaves in the gutter and the old paper-seller's voice, made him whirl around. A dark shape, no transient, dodged into the shadows. Somewhere ahead of him a door slammed, and the sound reverberated up and down the empty street. Almost without thinking, Sawyer ran towards the spot, anxious to discover which of the ancient doors led to a place beyond, and which was purely part of the façade. He was too late. There was no means of determining which door had slammed, nor were there any lights within the building to give him a clue.

Since Cassius appeared to have abandoned him, and because the enigma of Tavener's message was still unexplained, Sawyer turned towards the apartment building.

This time there was no distinct emphasis to guide him, but a sinister, brooding menace lay overall. He followed the path round to the side of the building and entered the now-darkened hall. Something, probably a rat, scurried in the darkness. The door to the apartment was partly open, and the apartment was illuminated only by the poor light which entered through the windows.

'Is anybody here?'

His question brought a strange quaver to his throat. Thankfully, there was no reply. He moved into the lounge. In the dimness the room was much as he had remembered it, except that the occupant was missing. If there was dilapidation here, it was too dark for him to see it. Trembling slightly, he moved into the study to find the spot on which the impossible legend had been displayed. He found the wall, and the crayoned message was still there. The difference was that the wallpaper on which it was written was now detaching from the wall.

'Martin—this is some sort of trick, isn't it?' Cassius's voice sounded extremely ominous.

'If it is, I'm the one who's caught in it.'

'The only other explanation is if Tavener never went to Russia at all.'

'I never said he did. It wasn't my idea. But it still doesn't explain this model of an abandoned London street—because London hasn't been abandoned yet. Get me out of here, Andrea.'

'No, damn you! You can stay there until you rot if necessary. I have to start getting some damn sense out of this. I'll deal with you later.'

Leaving the apartment and entering the corridor, Sawyer turned deliberately right, remembering how close he had been to the wire on his previous jaunt. He knew that this time, having started from a different place in the model, he had not yet moved far enough to be near to the wire. However, the thought of falling among those jaggedly rusted barbs without being able to see them was sufficient to give him great caution.

In the street outside he found the air of menace had in-

creased. Its origin was indefinable; but every line of the buildings and streets was edged with a shade of something sinister. The atmosphere almost crackled with a high-tension expectation of something dreadful which was yet to come. It brought back to his mind Woulfe's words: 'These are the streets through which imagination roams, the territories of dream and nightmare ...'

The thought was not appealing. A nightmare within oneself could be bad enough. To be within a nightmare was a prospect that made his flesh crawl. These deserted streets were already evidence of the strength and scope of Tavener's imagination. But if he started to haunt the model with horrors...

'Martin!' This was Haven's voice on a different channel. 'What the hell are you doing to Cassius?'

'I'm not doing a thing.'

'Well, something's got her worried. She's running around like a mad crocodile, biting pieces out of everyone. She's driven Woulfe to the verge of a nervous breakdown. What's going on?'

'You tell me. Seems my bit of the model ought to be in Russia, but isn't. She can't blame me for that.'

'Not if it's true.' Haven's voice was dubious. 'But I hope you know what you're doing, boy.'

'I've just told you, I'm not doing a thing.'

'I could almost believe you, but I'm darn sure Cassius won't. You people sure take one hell of a chance!'

'I'm not people. I'm just me. And I didn't ask to be here in the first place.'

'Then you're being used as a catpaw in a particularly dirty game. There's only one piece of advice I can give: get Cassius before she gets you—because that bitch isn't going to show you any mercy when she gets you back here.'

The connection was cut hastily, as though Haven had been interrupted. For the first time, Sawyer seriously considered removing the helmet and equipment packs and trying to make a run for it. The only thing that stayed his hand was Cassius's warning that she would enjoy stopping him. Cassius's idea of enjoyment would undoubtedly be painful to the recipient.

There was a movement on his right, just out of his line of sight, the same half-formed something which had worried him earlier. Its presence seemed to heighten the tension in the model, and the phenomenon was almost surrounded by an aura of white, which prevented it from remaining too closely concealed against the wall. With the memory of the look which had passed between Cassius and Woulfe when he had raised the point during the debriefing, Sawyer was now certain that this was another cognicenter, probably one whose owner was not capable of the empathy needed for a full access to the model.

'Who are you?' He spoke firmly, although a quaver remained at the back of his voice.

No answer.

'Andrea—I know it's you. It was you before, wasn't it?'

'Damn you, Martin!' Having been indetified, the strangeness grew to a cohesive shape and the white aura became a starched surgical coat. Cassius was standing beside him. A wicked looking gun was in her hand. Sawyer became lost in the speculation of what might happen to Tavener if she fired it in the model.

'Answer me one thing,' he said at last. 'If you've access to the model yourself, why'd you torment me with it?'

'Because I don't have direct access. I'm processing your interpretation, and using that to give me access. You're a pathetically simple creature compared to Tavener.'

'Thanks very much! Anyway, I hope you're satisfied. I told you this wasn't Russia.'

'Yes, but what I mean to find out is why it isn't Russia.'

'I don't see the point. Somebody made a mistake, that's all.'

'The point is nobody made a mistake. The here and now of this part of the model does correspond to the period Tavener spent out of Finland.'

'But how can it? Why should he bother to smuggle himself back home?'

'Perhaps because the whole thing was set up to work that way.'

'Set up? By whom?'

She looked at him pityingly. 'You can't really be that naïve. Don't you think that in my profession I might have acquired a few enemies?'

'I'd not given it a thought. Now you mention it, it does have possibilities.'

'You never lose that blasted sense of humour, do you.' Her eyes were continuously alert, watching the streets and the buildings.

'In my situation, it's about the only thing I have left.'

'You won't even retain that by the time I've finished with you. I'm going to break you, Martin.'

There was a sudden sound in the model. A sharp rattle like the opening of a window. Cassius heard it, and she stiffened suddenly and slipped the safety catch on her gun.

'Who've you seen around?'

'The old paper-seller's still down at the corner, and I thought I saw someone go into a door along there somewhere. Everywhere else seems deserted.'

'You'd better be right. If you're part of this conspiracy, I'll guarantee you won't get out of it alive.'

'Hell, I didn't even know there was a conspiracy!'

'Then walk straight down the street towards the corner. I want to see what happens.' Her gun was pointing directly at him.

Sawyer did as he was bid, not sure if he was more afraid of Cassius or of the things he might find in the model. Half-way down the road his mind caught on to the absurdity of his position. Here he was on a remote airstrip in Scotland, wandering blind under a formidable weight of electronic gear. Near him on the same inhospitable strip of grass and tarmac stood Cassius, similarly garbed. The walls and halls of the model through which he trod so fearfully were nothing but an electronic chimera, reflections of a land built in the soft pulp of another man's brain. It was inconceivable yet true that these apparently solid walls around him were nothing more than logical concepts in the mind of a man who lay unconscious on a bed.

As he passed warily down the street, a reflection in a shop window caused him to pause. This time the image he saw was his own, slightly drawn and haggard, but the dark

glass was certainly returning his own features. That was not all, however. A second figure stood near him in the reflection—Alec Tavener, his ugly face set in a broad, discerning grin. Sawyer swung round, expecting to find the figure at his side; but he was alone except for Cassius, who was watching him narrowly from a distance. He turned back to the window, and the image of Tavener was still there. It greeted his consternation with a characteristic mock salute, then faded out of range as though it could come and go as it pleased through the fabric of the model.

Perplexed, Sawyer continued to the corner, not certain if his own imagination was playing tricks or whether some guiding intelligence in Alec Tavener was still subtly controlling the scene.

The last idea held a sudden appeal. To induce Cassius to come into an aggressive model would take her out of the safety of her own environment and place her in a territory where an enemy could decide the rules of the game. His first reaction was to doubt whether any actual harm could result to Cassius, since it was only through an artificial cognicenter that she was present in the model. Then he remembered the complete sense of reality with which the impressions were received—the indisputable solidity of the streets and buildings and the cold liquidity of the half a pint of bitter he had consumed on his first jaunt. The sensations did not need to have any external existence in order to be accepted as fact.

And the infamous Cassius has strayed into the hellraising mind of Alec Tavener . . . Into a baited trap . . .

SEVEN

SAWYER knew suddenly what he had to do. He had no idea what sort of effects could be used against Cassius; but he knew now the reason for the tension in the model. She was going to be attacked. However, she would have one certain means of escape—she could remove the vital helmet which was feeding her the impressions. He had to get back to her proximity, so that if necessary he could free himself

and pinion her arms to prevent her breaking a vital connection. It would be a dangerous manoeuvre. Almost certainly Haven would be out on the airstrip guarding her from a chance encounter with the wire. Nevertheless, he felt he had to try.

Then he stopped, frozen with horror as he saw the rats. Thousands on thousands of them, large, grey, red-eyed and vicious, they eased themselves through cracks in ruined doorways, leaped from ledges above the shopfronts, poured out of drains, and scurried around corners in a continuous tide; the sound of their feet making a continuous scrabbling along the pavements, and their squeaking filling the air with apprehension. Together with them came an extraordinary rodent stench, a smell which was utterly nauseating with its suggestion of foul sewers and slime and hideous disease. In a continuous, horrific, moving carpet, they swept up the road towards Cassius.

'Martin!' The absolute panic in her voice proclaimed that her fear was as much psychological as it was physical.

Sawyer turned back towards her, viewing with some distaste the idea of venturing among the stream of vermin. While they were nominally targeted on Cassius, there was nothing slavish about their movements, and more than one broke out of the rush to make a dart at Sawyer's legs. He kicked off two of them with a well-aimed shoe, feeling the weight of their heavy little bodies as he struck out. Another one climbed his trousers, and he felt the sharpness of its claws penetrating the cloth. He tried to strike at it with his hand, but the creature changed its mind and leaped away to follow its fellows. Thereafter Sawyer took care to keep behind the running furies and made no attempt to wade among them.

'Martin!' It was more of a scream than a call. Cassius had her back against a wall. Encircling her just out of range of her feet, a thousand snarling rodents filled the area, leaping over each other and fighting among themselves in their anxiety to be well-placed for the kill.

Cassius raised her gun and fired straight at the horrifying throng. To Sawyer's immense relief the bullet did not penetrate the model but ricocheted from the concrete and

spent its energy against an adjacent wall. Probably a dozen rats died from the one bullet, because of the density with which they were packed. There was a minor scrummage in their ranks, and then new faces appeared at the edge of the crowd, some still with gore on their whiskers and noses.

'Woulfe—get me out of here!' Cassius had apparently given up hope of Sawyer's intervention, and may even have read what was written in his eyes. She fired again. Three shots. The effect was considerable, but the supply of rats was inexhaustible.

'Woulfe. For God's sake!' This was an appeal rather than a command. She expended the rest of the bullets, then flung the gun as well. There was still no sign that the controller of the mind-jant was going to pull her out.

'Woulfe!' She was actually crying with terror.

'My dear Cassius,' Woulfe's voice came over the headphones. 'I think you've cried Woulfe once too often.'

'Get me out...!'

The connection was cut dead, as if the psychiatrist did not care to improve on his own wry joke.

Then Sawyer saw her hands move, and knew that she was attempting to find the cable couplings on the equipment packs to break herself out of the nightmare. The rats saw the movement too, and chose that moment's inattention to make their attack. Horrified, Sawyer saw her engulfed by a living cloak of carnivorous rats. Her screams were a fantastic frenzy. She threw herself down and rolled among her attackers in a last desperate attempt to break the vital connection before she was eaten alive.

Sawyer knew what he had to do, but his fingers would not move fast enough. He managed to break his own cable connections, and the scene went dark, but he did not know if this left him blind yet still in the chambers of the horrifying mind-scene. The helmet buckles were difficult to manipulate, and each seemed to take an eternity to undo. Then he was able to wrench the helmet from his head, and the reaction of something wrong in the sequence of his disconnection gave him an instant and violent headache. He was back on the airstrip and Cassius was on the ground some little way away, still suited, and rolling and kicking and

struggling as though seized by a fit to end all fits. Her hands were still making convulsive movements with the equipment couplings but the feedlines were yet unbroken. He was halfway towards her when Haven swung out of nowhere and knocked him down with a cruel blow on the side of his head.

'Stay there! Don't try anything, Martin, or I'll kill you!'

The big American continued to run towards Cassius, signalling for the land-rover to come at crash speed from the perimeter. As he reached Cassius, she stopped kicking and twisting and sat up, breaking her own cable connections and leaning forward obediently to have her helmet unstrapped. By some mechanism she, too, had managed to escape from the nightmare. As they stripped the equipment packs from her she stood up and walked brokenly to where Sawyer still lay.

'Thank you, Martin!' There was bitterness and irony in her voice. 'I know you didn't intend it, but you just saved my life. I'll never forget your part in this.'

Then she slipped to the ground in a dead faint.

With a sick fascination, Sawyer looked at the face which fell beside him. Although unblooded, her now deathly-white skin was plainly and considerably puckered by the sharp indentations of rats' teeth, especially around her lips and throat, and the soft flesh round her eyes. It was easy to imagine the pain and absolute terror she must have experienced as the rats crawled all over her head and began to eat pieces from her face.

They lifted Cassius away and drove her off in the land-rover. Sawyer attempted to stand, but the big American came over and knocked him down again and put his heel across Sawyer's throat. But there was humour on his lips and a kind of admiration in his eyes. Finally he helped the physicist to his feet and laid a heavy but comradely arm around his shoulders.

'Like I said, Martin,' he said affably. 'You people sure take one hell of a chance!'

'Would it do any good if I said I still don't know what this is all about?'

'You can tell me anything you like. But from the look of

her I'd guarantee this is one method of persuasion Cassius won't be using again.'

'What did she mean,' asked Sawyer, 'when she said I'd saved her life?'

'She meant just that,' said Woulfe. He was driving his own Rolls southward with micrometer precision. Tony Haven and Sawyer sat in the back. 'If she'd stayed in contact with those rats for very little longer she'd undoubtedly have been killed. But she was re-processing your interpretation of the model. Whatever your motives, when you took your helmet off, it disrupted the fidelity of the impressions she was receiving. The rats lost their reality, and she got out.'

'I really loused that one up, didn't I?'

'Alec warned you to attend to your own survival. We didn't expect you to participate actively against Cassius. But anyway, it doesn't matter—we won on points. Mind-jant is fairly certain to be de-classified now, and Cassius's nervous condition will keep her out of circulation for six months at least. If I know anything of her masters, it could even be longer than that.'

'And Alec?'

'He'll need a few weeks rehabilitation. Deep sedation for that length of time won't have done him any good physically; but mentally he'll be wonderfully refreshed.'

'Could those rats really have killed her? After all, they didn't actually exist.'

'They didn't need to. It was only necessary for her to believe they existed. Her own subconscious did the rest. You saw the way the bites registered. That's typical of enhanced psycho-somatic activity. Normally our minds filter out the worst excesses of the things that happen in our models. But she was exposed to Alec's model without any filters in the circuit. Her psyche will be firmly convinced that half her face is eaten away.'

'I still don't understand how you achieved the image of an abandoned street in Alec's mind.'

'An exercise in hypnosis. The information which builds the model is compounded as much of suggestion as it is of

factural observation. This is why so much of the model seems odd and incorrect to another observer. Alec was put under deep hypnosis, and part of the model was modified by suggestion to appear intriguingly aged and to contain the rats.'

Tony Haven had been listening to the conversation so far without comment. Now he leaned forward. 'Excuse my curiosity, but nobbling Cassius right under our noses was the damndest trick I've ever seen. I'd kind of like to know by whom we've been outsmarted—strictly off the record, of course.'

'For that you'll have to ask Alec himself,' said Woulfe. 'Though I doubt if you'll get a good answer. The whole thing was set up for the good reason that a lot of people were very unhappy about the methods of interrogation Cassius was using. Interrogation may be an unfortunate necessity, but taken to extremes you destroy the only thing worth fighting for—humanity. But since we're speaking off the record, Alec never did go to Russia. And that breakthrough in fusion technology still remains to me made.'

'So it was all an elaborate plot aimed at the destruction of Cassius? That was a pretty rare piece of organization.'

'For myself, I'll be glad to get away from all this cloak and dagger stuff. I want to get back to my proper task of developing mind-jaunt for therapeutic uses.'

'And Martin—what's your angle?' Haven was acutely curious.

'Would you believe I'm the original innocent bystander?'

'I'm afraid not. And I don't think Cassius will either, when she's had time to think about it. I'd advise you to go missing from this planet about the time she gets back into harness.'

'But I was an innocent victim.'

'In Cassius's book, nobody's innocent. It's just that some need a little more persuasion before they admit to being guilty. But she took a personal interest in you, Martin, right from the start. That probably made her drop her guard a bit. Rest assured, boy, you're one person she isn't going to forgive.'

'What'll happen to her?'

'She's in a state of hysterical shock which will have a severe aftermath,' said Woulfe. 'Frankly, she's a very sick woman. One thing few people know about Cassius is that she's totally unable to bear any sort of pain herself. Hence her morbid preoccupation with pain in other people. They're flying her back to the States for intensive treatment. As a medic I shouldn't say this—but I rather hope they don't succeed.'

'There's one thing still puzzles me,' said Sawyer. 'Who was the woman in the apartment room? I can't help feeling her face was familiar.'

'Oh, that was Alec's sister. She's a bit of a hellraiser herself. Married to some sort of senior intelligence officer who doesn't have much time for Cassius. Together they talked Alec into this. And who else could you find who'd allow Alec to write large messages on the wall of the apartment?'